

Against the Lie: Part I (A Preliminary Draft)

(Lightly footnoted version)

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Chapter 1: On lying in general

I strongly believe that *all* of the problems facing human society can be traced to people's collective choice to embrace the Lie, with the Lie being viewed as a metaphysical force in the world. That, however, is not how most other people see things. They might agree that—as a general proposition—lying is the source of many problems in the world. But even though they will claim not to *like* lying, they continue to *tolerate* the people and institutions that do the lying so long as none of the specific lies they tell happens to greatly disadvantage or displease them personally; and, needless to say, they also tend to be quite tolerant of their own lies. In other words, they often have a very easy-going attitude regarding lies they consider “harmless”—but what they really mean by “harmless” is harmless *to them* and *their* narrow range of goals and concerns.

People's overall tolerance of lying is thus a product of their readiness to make a mental distinction between “big lies” and “little lies.” (What I am calling “little lies” are not necessarily the same as what people ordinarily consider to be “white lies”—although “white lies” would be included within the class of what people would consider to be “little lies.”) A “big lie” is any lie that is considered to be especially egregious from their own perspective. For that reason, lies of this type will often be ones that they have heard told by persons holding positions of power and influence, since such lies will be more likely to entail widespread negative repercussions for society; but a “big lie” can also include any lie otherwise perceived by a person as having a significant negative impact on his emotional life. A lie regarded by a particular person as a “big lie” is not easily forgiven. But that same person will often readily make excuses for what he perceives to be “little lies”—that is, the type of lies whose harmful impact are not apparent to him, usually because they do not have a significant impact on him personally (or, more likely, because he does not *understand* how they impact him personally, and does not see the connection between a particular lie and his own suffering). One way of thinking about it is that a “big lie” is the kind of lie that a person cannot ordinarily imagine *himself* telling or having the opportunity to tell, while a “little lie” is the kind of lie that a person both tells and would like to keep telling—or *hearing*, in the case of the mass media, politicians, book authors, and everyday gossips. As an example of this second type of situation, involving a willingness to *listen to* lies, those who are passionate about party politics will be quick to rationalize or diminish the seriousness of lies told by a member of the political party they support, but will be merciless toward any member of the opposing political party caught telling a lie of any kind.

Some of the theoretical and practical problems with the attempt to divide lying into degrees of importance or magnitude of harm should be obvious. One problem with it is that the social hierarchy is a continuum; and a person's “little lies”—the ones he can imagine himself telling—will always tend to shade into more and more influential “big lies” if he moves up the hierarchy, as those remote “movers and shakers” become less remote from him, and he begins to find it easier to imagine *himself* telling the same type of lie to further his *own* self-interest. A second problem is that *every* individual always has at least some influence on others, and this influence cannot be contained within neatly circumscribed limits. If one person becomes accustomed to the idea that lying is acceptable, then that makes it more likely that others in his circle of direct influence will also become accustomed to the idea, and the ripple of influence will continue to spread out from there. A third problem is that those at the top of a social hierarchy require the

support of those below them in the hierarchy; social elites need the common people to at least *believe* that they more or less share the same values. The less honest the common people are, the more lying the elites can get away with out in the open—which means that they are emboldened to try to get away with even more than *that* in secret, knowing that even if their secret does come out, it will not seem as shocking and unforgivable as it otherwise would, so that they will likely be able to recover from the disclosure. In other words, it is the dishonest tendencies of ordinary people that *make possible* the dishonest tendencies of society’s governing and influential elites.

But all of these points also help to show why, even if one were to accept the theoretical possibility of making of some sort of objective distinction between “big lies” and “little lies” based on magnitude of harm, it is not a distinction that should ever be made in practice. That is because, as a practical matter, ***it is impossible to clearly identify and then punish the liars in a society when everybody lies***, even if only to a supposedly “small” extent. But, by the same token, ***the dissemination of “big lies” would be impossible*** if people as a whole refused to keep laughing off the “little lies” that they regularly tell and encounter in their day-to-day lives, since in that case *any* lie would begin to appear far more conspicuous and remarkable when it occurred than it otherwise would; it is just that the so-called “big lies” would appear *even more* conspicuous and remarkable than other lies in the eyes of those persons who saw them as “big lies.”

While people are generally able to agree on what constitutes honesty or dishonesty in a particular case, people as a whole will *never* agree on what constitutes a “big lie” or a “little lie”: One person’s “little lie” will often be another person’s “big lie,” and vice versa, depending on their respective interests and temperaments. The result of trying to make a distinction between “big lies” and “little lies” is that people as a whole keep lying and enabling other liars, all the while thinking quite highly of themselves as “*pretty much* moral.” They will continue to condemn the lies told by others that do not happen to be to their liking, and this is what allows them to claim to hate lying and to love honesty just as much as anyone else—that is where the “moral” part comes in. But at the same time, lies that are thought to be conducive to their own (relative) personal advantage will be given a free pass—that is where the “pretty much” part comes in. *This is an unworkable system.* Even though people as a whole will never agree with each other on what qualifies as a “big lie” or a “little lie” in a particular instance, if they make the attempt to think rationally, they should recognize that ***it is precisely because people will never reach agreement on these questions that everyone benefits in absolute terms if all people agree to stop all lying.***

For example, people often complain about the many lies regularly told by mass media outlets. But what if *everyone* had stubbornly refused to have anything more to do with any television network, newspaper, or website the very first time it had been discovered telling its first lie, *regardless* of whether that lie seemed to benefit “their” political party or the other one? That media outlet would never have had an opportunity to tell a second lie; or, the price it would have paid to get back into people’s good graces would have been so high that it would never have even considered telling a second lie. *All* lying can be stopped if the benefits expected to come from telling any single lie are always greatly exceeded by the anticipated costs of telling that lie. But if only the occasional lone individual makes this decision to boycott a media outlet, it has no positive effect on society as a whole; it only succeeds in making it more difficult for that individual to

communicate with other members of society, by making him ignorant of his society's common terms of reference. Individuals must associate and find support for their moral principles in communities of people sharing the same beliefs if there is to be any hope of moving society as a whole in the direction of greater honesty.

Historically, providing the institutional framework for such moral communities has been the function that Christian churches and other traditional religious organizations have claimed to serve. But, as I now proceed to argue, it is a function that they are incapable of carrying out *by their very nature*, since they have embraced and they promote the practice of religious esotericism—which is itself a form of lying. But esotericism in religion is not merely one form of lying: I believe that esoteric religion—also sometimes known as “traditional religion,” or “revealed religion”—is the ultimate *source* of lying in human society.

Chapter 2: On religious esotericism in general, and how it is really just a form of lying

“Esotericist writing” can generally be defined as writing in which an author uses a word to mean one thing (namely, the “inner,” or “intended,” or “esoteric” meaning) in his own mind and perhaps also in the minds of close associates, while the general reading public, being unaware of the author’s secretly intended meaning, is left to assign a different meaning to that same word (namely, the “outer,” or “standard,” or “ordinary,” or “conventional,” or “exoteric” meaning). In other words, “esotericist communication,” or “esotericism,” is really just a fancy name for *lying*. Unfortunately, it is a practice that characterizes and provides the basis for all of the so-called “major world religions,” including Christianity. And not only the “major” religions: I am not aware of a single traditional religion anywhere in the world, including among all the so-called “shamanistic” or “primitive” religions, that does not or did not employ “secret languages” and conceal knowledge from the “uninitiated” members of the religious community.

At the same time, I have also come to the conclusion that the authors of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible were actually, at least to some extent, *opposed* to the practice of esotericism, and were subtly and surreptitiously working against it. That is to say—*whether or not they were fully aware of it*—they were providing later generations with the means by which they would be able to slough off these oppressive systems of organized deception. I think that the “subversiveness” to be found in the Bible must have been partly the result of some sort of unconscious or non-conscious (or, if one prefers, “providential”) process at work; but the evidence has led me to conclude that it must have also been partly the result of conscious and deliberate choices and planning by certain individuals. However, it is often very difficult to determine just how much of the “subversiveness” that one might discern in a particular passage from the Bible was consciously or unconsciously intended by the author (and I *do* consider “unconscious intentionality” to be a genuine kind of intentionality), since the two types of thinking easily blend together. But I will be discussing these matters more in subsequent chapters.

First, let me give you an example of how esotericist deception works by telling you a little story about myself:

I worked for forty years in West Virginia as a coal miner. I now receive health benefits from the federal government because of the fact that I got black lung disease as a result of my job.

Now, by ordinary standards, what I just told you is a flat-out lie. I have never worked as a coal miner. I have never lived in West Virginia. But an esotericist has a neat trick he can use to make a passage like that suddenly become all “true” in his own mind. He simply puts *invisible quotation marks* around various words and then supplies each of those words or phrases with his own private definitions. Doing this serves basically the same function in his own mind as that served by a child crossing his fingers behind his back when he tells a lie. Practitioners of this trickery will often give their hidden definitions a euphemistic name, such as “the spiritual interpretation.” Now watch and begin to perceive the deep “spirituality” contained within my own little fib story:

I “worked” “for forty years” “in West Virginia” as a “coal miner.” I now “receive health benefits” from the “federal government” because of the fact that I got “black lung disease” as a result of “my job.”

Because of the presence of these previously invisible quotation marks, an esotericist might be of the view that I had actually, in some sense, been “telling the truth” all along when I said that I worked as a coal miner in West Virginia (on the grounds that I was really only claiming to have “worked” as a “coal miner” in “West Virginia”). But ordinarily, an author who was writing esoterically would not feel morally obligated to publicly reveal what these words actually meant in his own mind, or even that his words *had* concealed alternative meanings (in other words, he would not even indicate to the reader where the “invisible quotation marks” were located). That is because an esotericist author usually fancies himself to be one of the relatively “holy people,” while most of the persons into whose hands his esotericist writings could be expected to fall would be counted among “the profane.” (From what I have been able to gather, those who write in an esoteric manner generally think of themselves as being of better spiritual quality than all those persons who make a point of not lying to others.) The reasoning seems to be that those persons who are “in the spirit”—that is, those who are counted among the “holy people”—will already know what the “real” meanings of these words are. And those persons who are not “in the spirit”—that is, those who are counted among “the profane”—do not deserve to know. However, since my goal here is not to practice esotericist trickery, but to expose it, I am perfectly willing to publicly reveal the (itself fictional) “spiritual interpretation” of my story:

I “engaged in meditative thought” “until I reached spiritual enlightenment” while “in an altered state of consciousness” by “plumbing the depths of my unconscious mind.” I now “enjoy the ineffable bliss of a continuing stream of spiritual wisdom” imparted to me by “more advanced spiritual beings” as my reward for “the sacrifices incurred” in choosing to follow “the arduous spiritual path.”

In other words, to obtain the “spiritual interpretation,” the words in the original text are redefined in such a way that the “exoteric” meanings are being made to serve as *metaphorical symbols* for the “esoteric” meanings that the author *really* has in mind. You might ask: Why would an author not simply provide the reader with that sort of “spiritual interpretation” in the first place? Why would an author expect a reader to break his “secret code” to arrive at his “real” meaning? As far as I have been able to determine, no rational justification exists for the practice (although there are of course *explanations*, just as there are explanations for everything). None of the justifications that I have encountered—to the extent that esotericists have even felt any need to justify what on its face appears to be an immoral practice—have struck me as being the least bit satisfactory or persuasive.

Unfortunately, the practice of writing or speaking esoterically—a practice found universally in traditional religion—has, understandably, helped to discredit the general idea of “organized religion.” But usually this discrediting has occurred indirectly and indiscriminately, so that it has not been the esotericist method *itself* that has been specifically targeted for blame and identified as the true source of what they dislike about

religion. What has ended up getting blamed is, say, the “childishness” of the literal interpretation—which allows the “spiritual interpretation” or “allegorical interpretation” to be seen as more “spiritually mature,” or “spiritually advanced,” or “profound.” Or, at other times what has been criticized is the notion of a group of people congregating around commonly-held religious beliefs—for fear that those beliefs and interpretations will *necessarily* have been irrationally and coercively imposed upon the individual members of the group. As I consider such criticisms to represent misdirections of appropriate blame, I offer the suggestion that people who think of themselves as “anti-religion,” or “anti-organized religion,” or “anti-Abrahamic religion,” or “anti-Western religion,” make a grave error by indiscriminately denigrating as “organized religion,” or “Abrahamic religion,” or “Western religion,” what should instead be specifically characterized as *esotericist* religion. It is the *deliberate encryption* or *obscuration* of an author’s meanings—and, closely related to this, the author’s fundamental desire to *avoid being held responsible* for his intended meanings—that is the source of all of the problems flowing from the currently existing (i.e., “traditional”) world religions, and not the fact that religiously inclined people happen to organize in groups for mutual support, encouragement, and validation of their shared beliefs. Because of the fact that the esotericism existing within traditional religion has helped to discredit the idea of religion in general, and also because of the enormous harm that it otherwise makes possible in the world, it is imperative that people learn to regard the cryptic symbolism of esotericist religions not as merely “silly” or “stupid” (much less “charming,” or “intriguing,” or “fascinating,” or “profound”), but as *evil* and *immoral*. The esotericist use of symbolism, inasmuch as it first creates and then exploits ambiguity of meaning, is an inherently *dangerous* phenomenon, and it potentially gives certain people enormous amounts of power: power that they do not deserve and that history has shown they do not know how to use responsibly.

Chapter 3: An anti-esotericist approach to the interpretation of esoteric symbolism: Using existing symbolic ambiguity to subvert religious esotericism

At the most fundamental level, what makes an esotericist system of religion dangerous is the ambiguity of the meanings of the symbols, parables, and figures that it employs; all of the other problems associated with esotericism essentially flow from this. (And it is the *deliberate* introduction of ambiguity of meaning by esotericist writers that makes esoteric symbolism *deceptive* in nature.) This ambiguity of meaning is dangerous because those who promote and use these esoteric symbols are not required to *take responsibility* or *be held accountable* for the meanings of those symbols, since no one can ever be entirely sure what those meanings *are*. Those who promote the symbols as something valuable do not believe it is necessary that the meanings that were *intended* by the author of a writing using those symbols be more or less definitely established according to generally accepted, reason-based principles of interpretation *before* the body of symbols be promoted as something valuable and praiseworthy. According to the basic arrangement created by esotericist religion, the body of esoteric symbols is viewed as coming from God, and *the symbols themselves* are therefore treated as “sacred,” while it is assumed that the specific *meanings* of those symbols can be determined later. (But without first knowing what their meanings were, it does not seem rational that any society would feel obliged to treat those symbols, or any writing that used them, as “sacred.”) Then, to the extent that various persons in a community or society revere the same symbols, they can *pretend* to inhabit the same community of meaning—even though, in fact, they do not.

Thus according to this arrangement, the symbols initially enjoy *automatic social authority*; and then, numerous interpreters will (for various reasons) try to *take advantage* of that already-existing social authority to induce or persuade “worshippers” of those symbols to assign the kind of meanings to the symbols that the interpreters would like them to. And when I speak of an “interpreter” here, I have in mind *any* individual reader of an esoteric writing, and not necessarily only someone trying to induce *other* people to adopt his own preferred meaning or meanings; moreover, the individual “interpreter” I have in mind is not necessarily restricted to assigning only a single meaning to a single symbol (or figure, or parable). The inevitable result of such a multitude of interpreters and possible interpretations is a plethora of *competing* and *inconsistent* meanings available for any given symbol (or figure, or parable). According to this arrangement, it is not deemed necessary that the range of possible meanings considered legitimate be limited to the meanings that a society *customarily*, in practice, gives to its symbols (especially including its words, idioms, and figures of speech) as they are used in specific contexts—although this is what would have served to ground the use of the religious language in a shared and commonly recognized social reality. And the fact that even a single interpreter can assign multiple and logically inconsistent meanings to a given symbol or a given set of symbols, gives rise to a *conflict* between meanings, or *anarchy* of meaning, that is found not only among the various individuals of a society, but also, quite frequently, within a single individual mind.

At the same time, from the perspective of those opposed to esotericism, the ambiguity of meaning in esoteric symbolism does have one possible saving grace: In any particular instance, to the extent that a symbol, parable, or figure is “open to interpretation,” such that its meaning is not yet clear to the reader, one meaning that might potentially be

assigned to that symbol, parable, or figure is *a meaning that has the tendency to oppose or undermine the esotericist arrangement itself*. In other words: *the ambiguity of esotericist writings can be turned against itself*. And if an esotericist scripture is considered authoritative, then that means that the full *authority* of the esotericist scripture can be made to oppose the esotericist arrangement. Because of the fact that this possibility is always available, there seems to be an inherently “self-annihilating,” or “self-neutralizing,” or “self-refuting” tendency within the basic phenomenon of religious esotericism that still remains to be exploited.

I hasten to point out that an anti-esotericist interpreter would not be justified in being intellectually dishonest in the way in which he assigned meanings to esoteric symbols, and I do not wish to suggest that it would be legitimate for him to reach conclusions that appeared to him to be *contrary to* the available textual evidence: conclusions, that is, that ignored clear evidence of how the esotericist authors *actually* understood the words that they were using—and this *even when* they were using those words in an esoteric manner. But, having said that, it must also be recognized that it is in the very nature of an esotericist writing that an interpreter can *never* be overwhelmingly certain of what the intended meanings of the author were. There will *always* be significant uncertainty about what those meanings were, even after every attempt has been made, by making use of the available evidence in a kind of “deciphering” or “decoding” process, to eliminate as much uncertainty and ambiguity as possible. *To the extent that* a meaning for a symbol—or, at least, a range of meaning—could be made clear beyond reasonable argument, the symbol would no longer pose the same “danger” that it once did. That is because, at that point, the *merits* of the “meaning”—that is, of the claim or proposition being made—can be evaluated on its own terms. But to the extent that the meaning was still *not* clear, and could not be made clear by any kind of scientific method, then it will often be possible for an interpreter to (legitimately) turn any *remaining* ambiguity or mysteriousness in the symbolism *against* any type of religious system that depends upon symbolic ambiguity for its continued existence. And, by doing so, the anti-esotericist interpreter would have reduced the *remaining* danger posed by the esotericist religious arrangement.

Doing this essentially involves making a conceptual division between what might be called the “propositional aspect” or “philosophic aspect” of an inner meaning of an esoteric writing, and its “unconscious aspect.” The “inner meaning” of an esoteric writing, viewed according to its “propositional aspect,” is capable of being understood with *some* degree of certainty—though never complete certainty—as the result of making a series of rational inductions and deductions, and arriving at propositions that can be clearly and intelligibly stated (some of which I will be offering in this essay for consideration). The “unconscious aspect” is that aspect of the esoteric writing which has not been reduced to discursive, expository, or propositional form—whether because it is not *possible* to do so given the nature of the thing, or because it has not yet been *figured out* how to do so. The work of interpretation involves coming to view an esoteric writing less from its “unconscious aspect,” and more from its “propositional aspect” (to the extent that the esotericist writing and the available explanatory evidence make this possible).

Further, the “propositional” and “unconscious” aspects can *each* in turn be divided into a “pro-esoteric” and “anti-esoteric” component or tendency. The *pro-esoteric* component of the “propositional aspect” can easily be refuted on logical grounds. The

pro-esoteric component of the “unconscious aspect,” since it too is *pro-esoteric*, is similarly illogical—but since this illogic occurs at an unconscious level, it is best thought of merely as a symptom of some sort of mental disturbance or pathology (in other words, it represents a person’s *misguided* and *socially harmful* unconscious efforts at individual ego-defense). The *anti-esoteric* component of the “unconscious aspect,” on the other hand, corresponds to what might be thought of as an individual’s “true self”; this represents the unconscious part of an esotericist author—which, though not “logical” *per se*, has not yet become *hostile toward* truth and rational thought—that is trying to find some way to “escape” from the “esotericist trap” in which the person finds himself caught.

The “deciphering” of the symbolism of the Bible can thus be done in such a way that an interpreter *assumes*—and not arbitrarily, but based on a substantial amount of actual textual evidence, some of which I present in this essay—that at least some part of the “unconscious aspect” of the inner meaning was (unconsciously) intended by its creators to be *anti-esoteric*. If *at least some part* of the “unconscious aspect” of the inner meaning can be reasonably assumed to have been *anti-esoteric* in intent, then there is no reason why interpreters who are opposed to esotericism should feel the need to grant equal status or recognition to *any other part* of the “unconscious aspect” of the inner meaning. (But, by the same token, since logical argument is *not* unconscious in nature, any sincere attempt at logical argument—even an allegedly bad one—always deserves a sincere attempt at a logical response.) In making attempts to interpret that “inner meaning,” there is nothing objectionable about “taking the side” of *anti-esoteric* tendencies within the “unconscious aspect” of the inner meaning against *pro-esoteric* tendencies within that same “unconscious aspect” of the inner meaning. Everyone’s time and mental energy are scarce, so that those of us who are *anti-esotericist* have no obligation to devote our efforts to helping the *pro-esotericist* “side” to explicate its various alleged “esoteric teachings” as well as they might be explicated by raising them out of the unconscious and symbolic form in which they have initially been presented—except to the extent that doing so aided us in advancing our own *anti-esotericist* position. A person’s choice to take this particular type of selective interpretive approach would be based at least partly on his first having been convinced of the basic immorality of esotericism—inasmuch as it is a form of organized deception—as well as of its irrationality (and indeed its *anti-rationality*). The *pro-esoteric* component of the “unconscious aspect” of the inner meaning would thus be regarded as *valueless*, since it is driven by what we should be able to agree is an *invalid* source of motivation. The esotericist phenomenon has caused almost unimaginable harm in the world, and it continues to pose a grave threat to all of humanity; and because of that, a sense of urgency requires that an interpreter not feel content to pursue “knowledge for its own sake” (as if doing such a thing were even possible) or refuse to “take a side” in the struggle between esotericist methods of deception and the goal of creating an honest form of society.

So, while we *anti-esotericists* should not affirmatively *misrepresent* the “esoteric teachings” or “inner meanings” to the extent that we are able to determine them, it is also not our responsibility to make a better argument for the *pro-esotericist* “side” than it could make for itself; nor need we accept that, with regard to our own *anti-esotericist* purposes, the authors’ intended meanings or “teachings” must be perpetually viewed as

something *completely* indeterminate and open-ended unless and until we were able to *fully* explicate those intended meanings or “teachings” in *all* of their various facets. In other words, it is possible for anti-esotericist interpreters to be *intellectually honest* but still not *disinterested* in this dispute, so that we would be willing to take advantage of explicated meanings *as they became available to us* in the course of employing our own anti-esotericist approach to interpretation. (And to speak of an “anti-esotericist approach to interpretation” is really just to describe the particular way in which we would choose to *focus our attention*, which would play a role in determining the associations and patterns within the symbolism that we ended up noticing.) In theory, perhaps, there would be nothing objectionable about pursuing other interpretive approaches to the esoteric symbolism—but only if time allowed for it, and only if there was some “payoff” for doing so. My personal hope is that by the time interpreters had the opportunity to explore the intended meanings from those other points of view, the question would have become largely moot, since much of the original interest in what those meanings were would have disappeared by then.

I am willing to concede that none of the authors of the Bible could have been *entirely* opposed to esotericist religion; otherwise, I believe, they would not have been willing to *do anything at all* that might promote it, even in the role of supposed “insider” or “subversive esotericist.” That is why I do not think it is possible for a person to assume that *solely* “conscious” motives were at work in the minds of the Bible’s authors if he hopes to show that their writings are opposed to esotericist religion. But whether conscious or unconscious in origin, there *is* copious evidence to be found within the Bible that indicates unease with and hostility toward the esotericist arrangement on the part of the Bible’s authors. The existence of such evidence cannot legitimately be ignored or discounted as merely allowing “one more way of interpreting the symbolism,” to be given dispassionate academic consideration and then, perhaps, rejected as “possible but unlikely,” or “possible but uninteresting.” That is because this interpretive approach is the one approach that cannot be regarded as “just another view,” since it provides the one reading that cannot possibly be *made consistent* with any of the other readings—since, unlike this one, all of the others implicitly *accept the continuing existence* of the esotericist arrangement, and so regard a multiplicity of interpretations as merely “enriching” that basic arrangement with an abundance of different meanings, no one of which is especially dangerous to the others—and no one of which especially *matters*. Thus one might say that the anti-esotericist approach is the only interpretive approach that creates a “house divided against itself that cannot stand.”¹ No matter the extent to which the anti-esotericist view was held unconsciously rather than consciously by the authors of the Bible (assuming, of course, that there is any significant evidence at all indicating that they indeed held this view), the very nature of the mental dynamic or “logic” that it sets up makes it impossible to ignore, because it gnaws relentlessly at the sense of coherence, certainty, and reliability enjoyed by the Bible as a source of authority in many people’s minds. I believe that in the long run, the “logic” set up by an anti-esotericist interpretation of the Bible (and of other esoteric writings) will make it literally more “compelling” than other interpretations—even if some people might at first resent the fact. I anticipate that the pervasive sense of doubt that it must inevitably tend to create in the minds of the Bible’s defenders will prove to be more than they can sustain,

¹ See, for example, Mark 3:25; also compare Judges 16:29-30.

until they finally decide that the mental effort required to keep trying to validate it in their own minds is simply not worth the cost, and they move on to better, non-esoteric religious options.

The medieval Jewish theologian Moses Maimonides, in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, writes regarding that work, “If anything in it, according to [the reader’s] way of thinking, appears to be in some way harmful, he should interpret it, even if in a far-fetched way, in order to pass a favorable judgment.”² While I do not advocate that esoteric writings (or any writings) be interpreted in a “far-fetched way,” I do think that the idea he expresses is relevant to the approach I am offering. Once a person has become convinced of the immorality and irrationality of esotericism, the only way in which he can “form a favorable judgment” of the authors of esotericist writings, including the Bible, is to deliberately *overlook* any tendencies on their part to *maintain* the esotericist system, while, at the same time, calling attention to any tendencies on their part to bring it to an end: in other words, to make a distinction or separation between *two or more different motives* that *co-exist* in their writings, and that are *working at cross-purposes*. In doing this, the interpreter makes the charitable assumption that their authors were trying to bring the esotericist system to an end *in the best way they knew how*, but that something—whether that “thing” was wholly inside themselves, or partly outside as well, for all we know—was *preventing* them from doing so immediately and outright. We can take it as a given that there were ways in which the unconscious minds of the New Testament authors were deviously trying to maintain the esotericist religious system, perhaps even as they told themselves that they were trying to oppose or reform it; but we might choose to instead focus our attention on the ways in which the unconscious minds of those authors may have been trying to *get out* of that mental quagmire, and trying to provide the means by which others might be able to *help* them get out. It is thus possible for an interpreter to make the existence of just such an underlying “desire to get out” his axiomatic starting point, so that he makes all of his interpretive decisions *with reference to* that basic assumption; and even if he does not entirely ignore other ways of interpreting the symbolism, he will at least “put them on the back burner,” so to speak.

Because of its deliberate *selectivity*, such an interpretive approach would of course not be able to provide convincing esoteric meanings for all of the symbols, figures, and parables found in the Bible; but then, *no* interpretive approach is able to provide convincing esoteric meanings (or, in some cases, *any kind* of plausible meaning) for all of the symbols, figures, and parables in the Bible. At the same time, there is a very good chance that interpretations generated by following such an approach might be made *at least as* persuasive as any other interpretations of the Biblical symbolism; and to be able to offer interpretations of that kind would facilitate the desired self-neutralizing of the Biblical esoteric symbolism, as well as of esotericist religion more generally.

² Shlomo Pines, trans. (University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 15; the brackets are mine.

Chapter 4: Evidence in the Bible of a desire by its authors both to “reveal” and to eliminate the practice of religious esotericism

[If you are reading the essay for the first time, feel free to skim over the bracketed content that I have inserted within the block quotations unless my discussion calls attention to it. And, if you find dealing with this type of material irritating, frustrating, and even exasperating, please know that I do as well. I discuss it not because I find it interesting or enjoyable to do so, but rather because I am hoping that at least some of my ideas might be of use to others in their efforts to put this whole subject matter and this whole way of thinking behind us once and for all.

[I furthermore wish to stress that I am *not* trying to offer any new breakthroughs in scholarship with this essay, or to advance “knowledge for its own sake.” I am not able to read ancient Greek or Hebrew, so by no means do I consider myself to be anything like a scholar in any of the subject areas with which I am concerning myself in this essay. Everything that I write is intended to be used *solely* for the ultimate purpose of weakening support for esotericist religion. Hopefully some of it will be of interest to those with scholarly backgrounds in the relevant subject areas who happen to share anti-esotericist objectives; but, even if not, I hope that at least some of it will prove useful to other amateurs like myself who are opposed to religious esotericism, and want to fight against its pervasive influence in human society and the status of legitimacy and respectability that it has generally been accorded. Anti-esotericists should feel free to simply disregard whatever material in the essay they do not consider useful for the specific purpose of opposing religious esotericism. And I emphasize that the strength of the general argument against esotericist religion *in no way depends* upon the validity or lack of validity of any of my speculations about the originally intended meanings of the Bible or other esoteric religious writings—since many of those speculations are necessarily quite speculative.]

The authors of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, left numerous clues—whether consciously or unconsciously—indicating that they hoped the esoteric or secretive way of structuring religions would someday be ended; or, to put it another way, indicating that they hoped that the esoteric/exoteric *split* in the interpretation of religious symbols would someday be overcome. In other words, I believe that these esotericists—or at least some “part” of each of them—was *hoping* that their “cover” would eventually be “blown,” or that their “veil” would eventually be “pierced.” And I do not think that the authors of the Bible were opposed to the systematic concealment of meanings merely in what we now know as the Jewish and Christian religions, but in *all* of the world’s religions: I believe that what they saw as needing to be eliminated was the very *type* or *form* of esotericist religion in general.

As an initial matter, there are a number of relatively explicit indications to be found in the Bible that tell the reader that he should presume that *nothing* within the Bible is to be read as a literal account of historical facts. For example, Psalm 78:2 basically states flat-out that the story of the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea is not to be understood literally: Before beginning to recount the story of the Exodus and the Israelites’ subsequent wandering in the wilderness, the psalmist writes,

I open [*pathach*; LXX: *anoigō*] **my mouth** [*peh*; LXX: *stoma*] **in parable** [*maschal*; LXX: *parabolé*, derived from *para-ballō*, meaning “to compare,” and more literally meaning “to throw next to”]; **I utter** [or bring forth; more literally, “let flow” or “let gush forth”]: *naba*; LXX: *phtheggomai*] **dark sayings** [or riddles, or puzzles, or enigmas, or obscure sayings; more literally, “knots” or “twistings”]: *chiydah*; LXX: *problēma*, derived from *pro-ballō*, literally meaning “to throw before”] **from early times** [or “from the east”; more literally, “from before”]: *qedem*; LXX: *arché*, meaning “origin, beginning”].³

Consider that “dark saying” is little more than a euphemism for “deceptive saying” or “misleading saying,” at least from the point of view of the “uninitiated.” “Light” is the perennial symbol of truth, openness, and imparting of knowledge and meaning, while “darkness” is the perennial symbol of falsehood, deception, and concealment of knowledge and meaning. And in the context of this particular verse, there is a possible suggestion that these cryptic sayings, which originally came “from the east” (Hebrew *qedem*)—at which point they were still infused with “light” (that is, when their meanings were still understood)—have become more and more “dark” to the extent that they have traveled toward the “west,” which is the direction traditionally associated in world myth with “death.”

In like manner, Acts 8:30-31 should make it clear that the Bible is written in a “secret language” that a person should not ordinarily expect to be able to understand:

³ There are several important warnings that ought to be given at this point. **First, both here and in the remainder of this essay, in most cases (unless I think there is some good reason to do otherwise) I do not provide the actual Hebrew or Greek word form that appears in the text of the Bible, but rather the word in Strong’s Concordance under which that word form is listed; so the English translation that is given in the text of the essay will not necessarily correspond to the grammatical form of the Hebrew or Greek word that is provided.** That means that whenever I give the definitions of a Greek verb, I will give the Greek verb in the first-person singular present active indicative form, but its English equivalent in the infinitive form.

Second, it should be understood that the hyphens that appear in the Greek words provided in this essay are found neither in the original Greek words, nor, ordinarily, in English transliterations of the words. I have inserted them to “break down” the words for the purpose of aiding the reader in seeing etymological relations between various Greek words that the reader might not otherwise have noticed.

Third, in any passage that I provide from the Old Testament, unless otherwise indicated, the italicized word that I give in brackets will be the (likely) Hebrew equivalent of the word, and in any passage from the New Testament, it will be the (likely) Greek equivalent. In some cases, in translations from the Old Testament I will use the abbreviation “LXX” to indicate the Greek word that was used in the Greek Septuagint (“LXX”) translation of the Old Testament to translate the original Hebrew word—which probably, but does not necessarily, correspond to the Hebrew word found in the 9th-10th century A.D. Hebrew Masoretic text that serves as the primary (but not the only) source for modern scholars’ and translators’ knowledge of the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament writings. (The Septuagint is a 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that appears to have influenced the authors of the New Testament.)

Fourth, all translations from the Bible are my own. As I have already mentioned, I do not read either Greek or Hebrew, so I have obviously had to rely on the translations of others (along with what I have learned from Greek and Hebrew lexicons), but the final decision on how I think a particular passage is best translated has always been my own. (And my inclination has always been to translate the text as literally as possible such that it does not lead to grammatical or stylistic awkwardness in English—but in some cases I have opted for a literal translation even if that is the unavoidable result.)

And Philip, having run up to (the Ethiopian eunuch), heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, “So do you really [or truly, or even, or at least, or indeed: *ge*] understand what you are reading?” And (the eunuch) said, “How indeed could I be able (to do so) [or, ‘have the power (to do so)’: *dynamai*], unless someone will guide me?”

An even more open admission of the esoteric nature of the Bible can be found in 1 Corinthians 9:9-10. In this passage, Paul, in justifying his right to “reap fleshly things” from the Corinthian church members after having “sown spiritual things” among them, writes,

For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is threshing out the grain.” Is it with oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake?

I would describe this as a kind of “smoking gun” passage. In effect, whether he realized it or not, Paul was telling the reader: ***You are not entitled to assume that any word in the Bible necessarily means what it at first appears to mean.*** To illustrate the logical implications of this, consider the fact that Genesis 1:1 says, “**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**” In commenting on this passage, in order to persuade those whom he was addressing to give it some interpretation other than a literal one, Paul could just as easily have written, “Is it with (literal) heavens and earths that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake?” In both cases, the implication would be that everything of which the Bible speaks is potentially serving as a symbol or metaphor for some idea *other than* the one that is *seemingly* being presented to the reader.

Furthermore, when Paul rhetorically asks, “Does (God) not speak entirely for our sake?” he also seems to be implicitly stating that if a person interprets a passage of the scriptures according to its literal meaning, rather than some other meaning—and in either case, apparently, the meaning ought to be one that advances human welfare—it is because he has decided that that is how he *wants* to interpret it. After reading this passage and thinking through its full implications, a Christian reader can no longer feel justified in believing nutty things and then blaming it on God. Like it or not, the *individual interpreter* has now been made completely morally *responsible* for what beliefs he chooses to take away from the scriptures.

I believe that another indication of the existence of esotericism in the Bible, at the same time as its authors’ opposition to it (albeit in spite of themselves to some extent), is provided by the fact that at several points, the Gospels openly acknowledge that the figure of Jesus—who, I believe, *at least as he is presented in the Gospels*, was understood by the authors of the New Testament to be a fictional literary character—engaged in both secrecy and deception during his ministry. For example:

And (Jesus) said to (his disciples), “To you has been given the mystery [or the secret doctrine, or the secret teaching: *mystérion*] of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside [*exō*], everything happens in parables [*parabolé*]....” [Mark 4:11.]

And with many such parables [*parabolé*] he spoke [*laleō*] the word [or message, or meaning: *logos*] to them, in the degree they were able to hear [*akouō*]. And apart from a parable he would not speak [*laleō*] to them; but in private he explained [or interpreted, or determined, or resolved, or solved: *epi-lyō*, derived from *lyō*, both of which words can more literally mean “to untie, to release, to loosen, to open, to unlock, to set free”] everything for his own disciples. [Mark 4:33-34.]

(Jesus) said to (his disciples), “Our friend Lazarus is taking his rest [or, ‘has fallen asleep’: *koimaō*], but I go (to him) that I might awaken him [or, ‘bring him out of sleep’: *ex-ypnizō*, derived from *hypnizō*, which means ‘to put to sleep’ and is in turn derived from the word *hypnos*, meaning ‘sleep’].” Therefore his disciples said to him, “Lord, **if** [*ei*] he is taking his rest [or, ‘has fallen asleep’: *koimaō*] [in other words, “*If what you are telling us is in fact true*”], he will be kept safe [or made safe, or saved, or rescued, or preserved: *sōzō*, related to the Greek word *sōtér*, meaning ‘savior’].” Now Jesus had spoken [*ereō*] about his death [*thanatos*], but **it seemed** [or appeared: *dokeō*, related to the word *doxa*, which can mean either “opinion” or “glory”] to them that he was speaking [or “meaning”: *legō*] about the rest [*koimésis*, derived from the word *koimaō*] of sleep [*hypnos*]. So then Jesus told them plainly [or openly, or forthrightly: *parrésia*], “Lazarus has died [*apo-thnéskō*, related to the word *thanatos*, meaning ‘death’].” [John 11:11-14.]

In this last passage, carefully observe the Greek words being used, and notice how Jesus’s disciples initially took everything that he said *at face value*. ***The disciples’ supposedly incorrect “interpretation” of what Jesus said was essentially nothing other than a straightforward restatement of what Jesus had himself told them.*** In other words, what Jesus “really meant” was something *other than* what he actually *said*. Furthermore, it can be assumed that Jesus was not simply using a generally understood euphemism in the same way that other persons of the time would have used it, since in that case his disciples would not have been confused by what he told them; and I think it can also be reasonably assumed that Jesus knew that his disciples did not already speak his “secret language”—since, after all, they were *his disciples*, who were studying under him precisely for the purpose of *learning* his “secret language.” Based on that reasonable assumption, then by any standard definition of the word “lie,” Jesus brazenly told a lie to his trusting disciples (even though in this particular case he admitted his actual intended meaning immediately after he told the lie). For a person to secretly have one meaning in mind, but then knowingly speak to other people in such a way that they would likely think that he had something else in mind, is nothing other than to mislead and lie to those people. It could not be any more simple and obvious. So the question naturally arises: Why would the author of John 11:11-14 have wanted to portray Jesus as a liar?

I think part of the answer might be that this passage actually constitutes an attempt by the author—whether conscious or unconscious—to *educate and warn the reader* about the dangers of verbal ambiguity and the supposedly “harmless” use of elaborate undisclosed metaphors or private meanings that have the potential of evolving into full-blown “secret languages”; and also to *alert the reader* to the basic fact that the Bible was written in an esoteric manner. So I think one of its purposes may have been to lead the reader to be far more *wary* about the way in which words are used in esoteric writings

(and perhaps in non-esoteric writings as well) than the reader was probably already accustomed to being, and to encourage him to *start asking more questions* about the *meanings* of the words that he found being used in such writings. In fact, it may have been just this—that a “disciple” was willing to *ask* these sorts of questions about *meanings*—that was deemed to distinguish a “disciple” from other persons. And if so, then perhaps it can be inferred that if “Jesus” had been speaking to “non-disciples” or “non-initiates,” he would *not* have bothered to clarify himself (that is, speak “plainly,” or “forthrightly,” or “openly”: *parrésia*) in the way that he did for his “disciples.”

In response to my suggestion that Jesus was lying, a Christian (or devotee of some other esotericist religion) might still say that what Jesus told his disciples does not actually constitute a “lie” lie: he was just “being poetic.” It is the whimsical kind of lying that spiritual gurus and prophets are allowed to engage in, even if it is considered immoral when the rest of us do it. One problem with such a line of thinking is that the Bible itself does not appear to agree with it. Zechariah 13:2-4 says,

And it will come to pass in that day [that is, “the day of the Lord”], **says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off** [*karath*; LXX: *ex-olethreuō*, meaning “to extirpate, to obliterate”] **the names** [*shem*; LXX: *onoma*] **of the idols** [*atsab*; LXX: *eidōlon*] **from the earth** [or the land: *erets*; LXX: *gē*], **and they will be remembered** [*zakar*] **no more** [the LXX has “there will no longer be recollection of them”: *mneia*]; **and moreover I will cause the prophets** [*nabi*; LXX: *pseudo-prophétés*, meaning “false prophets”] **and the unclean** [*tumah*; LXX: *a-kathartos*] **spirit** [*ruach*; LXX: *pneuma*] **to pass away** [*abar*; the LXX has “I will remove”: *ex-airō*] **from the earth** [or the land: *erets*; LXX: *gē*]. **And it will come to pass that if a man** [*ish*; LXX: *anthrōpos*] **still** [or again: *od*; LXX: *eti*] **prophesies** [*naba*; LXX: *prophéteuō*], **his father and mother who engendered** [*yalad*; LXX: *gennaō*] **him will say** [*amar*; LXX: *ereō*] **to him, “You shall not live** [*chayah*; LXX: *zaō*], **for you speak** [*dabar*; LXX: *laleō*] **lies** [or falsity: *sheqer*; LXX: *pseudés*] **in** [or by] **the name** [*shem*; LXX: *onoma*] **of the Lord** [*yahweh*]”; **and his father and mother who engendered** [*yalad*; LXX: *gennaō*] **him will pierce him** [or pierce him through: *daqar*; the LXX has “will tie his feet together,” or “will bind him hand and foot,” or “will entangle him”: *sym-podizō*] **when he prophesies** [*naba*; LXX: *prophéteuō*]. **And it will come to pass in that day (that) every one of the prophets** [*nabi*; LXX: *prophétés*] **will be ashamed** [*bosh*; LXX: *kat-aischynō*] **of his vision** [*chizzayon*; LXX: *horasis*] **when he prophesies** [*naba*; LXX: *prophéteuō*], **and they will not put on** [*labash*] [the LXX instead has “they *will* put on”: *en-dyō*] **an outer garment** [*addereth*; LXX: *derris*, meaning “a skin”] **of hair** [*sear*; LXX: *trichinos*] **in order to** [or “having a purpose to”: *maan*] **deceive** [*kachash*] [the LXX instead has “in exchange for having deceived”: *anti* and *pseudomai*].

I suspect that what this passage is calling a “prophet” essentially corresponds to what I am calling an “esotericist,” that is, someone who speaks or writes while having “hidden meanings” in mind. If so, then a “prophet” would have been understood to correspond to a person who had been “initiated” into some body of secret knowledge and hidden symbolic meanings that had been concealed from the “profane” or “unworthy.” Also, observe that the author here associates “the prophets” with “the unclean spirit”—which perhaps means something like “the spirit of falsehood,” as opposed to what in the New

Testament is called “the spirit of truth.” It seems reasonable to suppose that what the author calls “prophecy” must have been deemed to be the cause (or at least one cause) of the “unclean spirit”; or else it must have been deemed to have been made necessary by the prior existence of the “unclean spirit”; or both at once. “Prophecy” as the term is used here may have been deemed to constitute a “defensive” or “subversive” use of esotericism (again, with “esotericism” being understood as the practice of communicating while having “hidden meanings” in mind), and thus a temporarily “justifiable” one. In addition, it is important to observe that, according to the Hebrew Masoretic text, the author neither states nor implies that the “prophets” he has in mind are “false prophets” (to be distinguished from some separate class of “authentic prophets,” or “truthful prophets”); any such assumption would be a gratuitous one.⁴

I believe that Chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation, which is located at the end of that book and describes the “new Jerusalem,” is pointing to the same ideal final outcome as does the passage from Zechariah 13 that I just quoted. But before considering the passage from the Book of Revelation, one ought to first give some thought to what the esoteric meaning of the Biblical symbol of a “stone” might be. I posit that the Biblical symbol of a “stone” (Greek *lithos*) was understood by the authors of the New Testament to represent a passage of scripture, word-symbol, idiom, figure of speech, allegory, metaphor, parable, or similitude, that makes little or no sense to the reader *except* when understood literally. Or, to state it in other terms, it may have been understood to be the deliberately obfuscating and misleading “outer meaning” of a religious symbol or passage of scripture; or, to put it yet another way, it may have been thought of as the bare physical symbol itself without its being accompanied by an understanding of the *significance* that the symbol had in the minds of “initiates.” Assuming that a definition along these lines is correct, it would seem to follow that “gemstones,” since they are “stones” that either reflect or transmit “light,” may have been understood to signify the

⁴ Not only is such an assumption gratuitous, it also tends to be negated if one makes a comparison between Zechariah 13:2-4, Zechariah 12:10, John 19:34, and John 19:37, as I explain below in the main text of the essay.

Also, there are several reasons for thinking that the Masoretic text is to be preferred to the Septuagint text in this particular case. The first reason is that—in my opinion—the translator of this portion of the Septuagint failed to correctly understand the intended significance of the “hairy outer garment” as an allusion to the motif of “Jacob impersonating Esau,” based on the episode recounted in Genesis 27 (as I discuss more below in the main text of the essay); and so “putting on the hairy outer garment” would have been something that the prototypical “prophet” would have needed to *stop* doing, and not *start* doing (as the Septuagint text seems to suggest). The second reason is that I believe the author of John 19:34 and 19:37 chose to follow the Masoretic text in regarding “piercing” rather than “binding hand and foot” or “entangling” (Greek *sym-podizō*) as being the “penalty” for “prophesying.” [However, in possible support of the Septuagint’s translation, see Genesis 22:9 (LXX), which describes Isaac as being “bound hand and foot” (*sym-podizō*) at the time that Abraham was about to sacrifice him as a whole burnt offering. In light of that fact, the “binding hand and foot” of the prototypical “prophet” may have been understood to be *preliminary* to a “piercing” or “slaughtering” of him, prior to his “burning.”] The third reason to prefer the Masoretic text in this particular case is that after the Septuagint’s use in the quoted passage of the Greek word *pseudo-prophētēs*, meaning “false prophet,” none of the remaining instances of the word “prophet” or “prophesy” distinguish between “false prophets” (or prophesying), and “truthful prophets” or “authentic prophets” (or prophesying)—which, combined with the fact that the Masoretic text never mentions any “false prophet” at all, leads me to think that the notion that the “prophet” being discussed was meant to be thought of as a “false prophet” (except in so far as *every* “prophet” is actually a “false prophet” in some sense) may have been added by the Septuagint translator as a supposedly “helpful clarification” that in fact departed from the intended meaning of the original Hebrew text.

revelation of the “true” (i.e., “intended”) meanings, or “inner” meanings, of these symbols; in other words, the symbol of “gemstones” may have been mentally associated with some process of *clarification of meaning* (or some state of *clarity of meaning*), as well as with figurative “enlightenment.”

Now consider how the city of the “new” or “heavenly” Jerusalem is depicted toward the end of the Book of Revelation:

And (an angel) carried me away in spirit [*pneuma*] up to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down [*kata-bainō*] out of heaven from God, having the glory [*doxa*] of God, its radiance [or light: *phōster*] like a most precious [*timiōtatō*, a superlative form of *timios*, meaning “precious, valuable”) (gem)stone [*lithos*], like a jasper [*iaspis*] stone [*lithos*], **being clear as crystal** [*krystallizō*]. ... The material of its wall was jasper [*iaspis*: in other words, the wall “**was clear as crystal**”], and the city (was) pure [or clear, or clean: *katharos*] gold [*chrysiōn*], **clear** [*katharos*] **like** [*homoios*] **glass** [*hyalos*]. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious [*timios*] stone [*lithos*] And the twelve gates (were) twelve pearls [*margaritēs*], each of the gates [*pylōn*] (made) out of a single [*henos*] pearl [*margaritēs*], and the street of the city (was made out of) pure [or clear, or clean: *katharos*] gold [*chrysiōn*], **transparent** [*diagēs*, related to *di-augazō*, meaning “to dawn, to shine through (the darkness)”) **as glass** [*hyalos*]. [Revelation 21: 10-11,18-19,21.]

Furthermore, the esoteric definition of “stone” that I suggested might also help to explain the author’s intended meaning in Matthew 24:1-2:

And Jesus, having gone out [*ex-erchomai*] from the temple [*hieron*], was going away [or going, or going forth: *poreuomai*], when his disciples came [or came near, or approached: *pros-erchomai*] to point out to him the buildings [*oiko-domē*] of the temple. And he replied to them by saying, “You see [*blepō*] all [*panta*] these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there shall not even be allowed (to remain) [*aphiēmi*] here (one) stone [*lithos*] upon (another) stone [*lithos*], that will not be broken down [or broken apart: *kata-lyō*].”

I surmise that what the author was predicting or hoping for here—consciously or unconsciously—was that the whole existing system of obscure and cryptic religious symbolism would be thoroughly dismantled as the result of a process of *analysis* (that is, a “breaking down” or a “breaking apart” of *received meanings* for the symbols into more “interiorized” and therefore *meaningful* meanings).

On numerous occasions the “idols” referred to in the Bible are described as being made of “stone” or “wood”; and I think the reason for this may be that these sorts of “idols” were understood to represent the type of *symbols* that were neither “living” (that is, meaningful), nor “vivifying” or capable of “making alive” (that is, capable of conveying meaning). Consider that most speakers of the English language (and, I assume, of many other languages as well) would, if someone spoke to them of a “dead symbol,” probably understand that to be a reference to the idea of a “meaningless symbol.” At the same time, one symbol that *does* convey the idea of “vivification,” or

“nourishment,” or “enlivening,” is that of “bread.” And indeed, we find the two symbols of “stone” and “bread” contrasted in Matthew 4:3:

And, having come near [*pros-erchomai*], the tempter [or tester: *peirazō*; i.e., Satan] said to (Jesus), “If you are a son of God [or, ‘if you are Son of God’], **speak** [*legō*] **so that** [or ‘to the end that,’ or ‘with the result that,’ or ‘in order that’: *hina*] **these stones** [*lithos*] **might become** [or result in, or beget, or issue in, or give rise to: *ginomai*] bread.”

The Greek word used here that I have translated as “speak” is *legō*, which can also mean “to mean,” and from which is derived the Greek word *logos*, which can mean “word” or “speech,” but also “meaning.” What I think might be happening here is that Satan, the “tempter” or “tester,” is challenging Jesus to *prove* that he is “a son of God” by *explicating* the “inner meaning”—which he refuses to do, perhaps in part because if he had done so he would have given away the “big secret” by disclosing the most important “inner meaning” of all: namely, that the whole *system* of differentiating “inner meanings” (i.e., “bread”) from “outer meanings” (i.e., “stone”) **needed to be brought to an end**, and that the entire practice of making a split between inner and outer meanings was *not* to be thought of as something laudable in itself. It seems, incidentally, that as part of the movement away from such a system, the old kind of “bread” would have been replaced (though perhaps only as a temporary measure) by some different kind of “bread,” namely, the “bread from heaven” or “manna from heaven” spoken of in John 6:32-51 (possibly signifying a type of discourse), all of which “bread” would have been highly “vivifying” or “nourishing”—that is, designed to readily *convey meaning*—and, at the same time, all of which would have been *available equally* to everyone (given inevitable differences in people’s natural capacities to understand or apprehend another person’s intended meaning in its fullness).

As I already indicated above, Revelation chapter 21 says that even though the “new Jerusalem” would have a “great, high wall” (verse 12), the material out of which this wall would be built was “jasper” (verse 18), so that it would be “clear as crystal” (verse 11). But in addition to that, Revelation 21:25, speaking of the wall of the city, says,

And in the daytime its gates [*pylōn*] **will never be closed** [or shut, or locked: *kleiō*]—**and there will be no night** [*nyx*] there.

I think what the author may have meant by this was that the inhabitants of the “new Jerusalem” would not be prevented from gaining an understanding of the meanings of religious symbols as a result of the practice of deliberate obscuration and concealment of meaning (signified by “night” or “darkness”); nor would any esoteric “keys” or “passwords” be required to “enter into” that understanding through “gates” that had been closed to them. Moreover, Revelation 21:27 says,

And nothing at all (that is) unclean [or profane; more literally, “common”: *koinos*] shall enter [*eis-erchomai*] (the new Jerusalem), nor anyone [or anything: *pan*] practicing [or causing, or creating, or producing: *poieō*] abomination [*bdelygma*] and

[*kai*] falsehood [*pseudos*], but only those who have been written [*graphō*] [or, “unless they have been written”] in the Lamb’s book of life.

Again, since I am assuming that the “unclean spirit” was meant to be contrasted with the “spirit of truth” or “Holy Spirit,” it seems to follow that in the author’s mind the “wall” of the “new Jerusalem” would have been designed not to hide or obscure the truth from genuine truth-seekers, but rather to separate unrepentant liars from those devoted to truth. It is not clear to me what “abomination” (*bdelygma*) was understood to mean; but notice that the text connects this word to the word “falsehood” (*pseudos*) by using the word “and” (*kai*) instead of “or” (*é*). So, whatever the term “abomination” was meant to signify, it can be assumed to have *invariably* accompanied “falsehood.” Furthermore, by contrasting a person who was “practicing abomination and falsehood” with “those who have been written in the Lamb’s book of life,” the suggestion is created that the author’s conception of “life” may have been understood to be either equivalent to or closely associated with his conception of “truth.”

It should be noted that I do not think that by his saying that “nothing at all unclean [or profane] shall enter (the new Jerusalem),” the author of Revelation 21:27 meant to suggest that he envisioned that any kind of split between the “sacred” and the “profane,” between “initiates” and “non-initiates,” would be maintained in the “new Jerusalem.” Rather, I think he meant to indicate that *the entire category of “the profane” was to be eliminated*, so that the desire or perceived need would no longer exist to “safeguard” certain kinds of knowledge by concealing it from those who supposedly could not be trusted with it (while, at the same time, effectively *lying about* having concealed it). In fact, such an idea is fairly explicitly stated in Revelation 22:3, which says,

And no longer will there be any curse [or “anything accursed”: *kat-anathema*] (in the new Jerusalem), and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will render service to him.

According to my reading of this passage, once the “new Jerusalem” came into being, *everything and everyone* would henceforth be considered “sacred” or “holy” in the religious sense—unless a person chose, primarily by lying, to “profane” *himself* or make *himself* “unclean,” and thereby *exclude himself* from the “new Jerusalem.” This notion of the entire category of “the profane” being eliminated is also suggested by Acts 10:14-15, in which Peter, replying to a voice telling him to “kill and eat,” says,

“By no means, for I have never eaten anything unclean [or profane, or impure, or common: *koinos*] **and impure** [or unclean: *a-kathartos*].” **And a voice** [*phōné*] (**came to him again a second** [*deuteros*] (**time**) [or ‘in a second (way),’ or ‘from a second (place)’]: **“What God has made clean** [or made pure: *katharizō*], **you must not profane** [or defile, or make unclean, or make impure, or make common: *koinoō*] (**in your own heart**).”

This same idea is also indicated by Romans 14:14, in which Paul writes,

I know and feel confident in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean [or common, or profane: *koinos*] because of itself [or himself, or herself: *heautou*], except to (a person) considering [*logizomai*] something [or someone: *tis*] to be unclean [*koinos*]: to such (a person), (it is) unclean [*koinos*].

In fact, passages such as these lead me to suspect that the author of Revelation 21:27 may have been partly ironic in his use of the word *koinos*—meaning “unclean” or “common”—when he says that “nothing at all unclean [or common: *koinos*] shall enter” the “new Jerusalem,” because by eliminating the previously made distinction between “initiates” and “non-initiates,” all meanings would, in one sense, be “made common”: That is, all meanings would be shared with everyone else and so be made *commonly available*. In another sense, however, the author would *not* have been using the word ironically, because I think the author’s view may have been that the meanings that had *formerly* been common (that is, the *exoteric* meanings) *were* to be left behind at a certain point—so that some *new* set or collection of commonly shared meanings could replace them.

The hypothesis that I am offering—that the authors of the Bible were writing esoterically for the purpose of criticizing esotericism—is supported by additional statements made by Jesus in the Gospels that I believe can readily be construed as somewhat oblique criticisms of esotericism. Here are some examples:

“You are the light [*phōs*] of the world. A city sitting [or lying, or positioned, or situated: *keimai*] on top of a hill [or mountain: *oros*] cannot be hidden [*kryptō*]. Nor do men light a lamp and place it under a bushel, but on a lampstand, and it shines for all those in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they might see your good works and might glorify [or ‘ascribe glory to’: *doxazō*] your Father in the heavens.” [Matthew 5:14-16.]

“Is a lamp brought in to be placed [more literally, ‘does a lamp come to be placed’] under a bushel, or under a bed? Is it not so that it should be placed upon a lampstand? For nothing whatever is hidden [or secret: *kryptos*], except so that it should be manifested [*phaneroō*]; nor has anything become concealed [or hidden away, or secreted: *apo-kryphos*], except so that it should come (to be) manifest [or apparent, or clear, or known, or visible, or evident, or open: *phaneros*].” [Mark 4:21-22.]

“I have spoken these things to you in figures [or parables, or allegories: *paroimia*]; an hour [*hōra*] is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures [or parables, or allegories: *paroimia*], but instead I will proclaim to you **plainly** [or **openly**, or **forthrightly**: *parrésia*] concerning the Father.” [John 16:25.]

(Jesus) was teaching [*didaskō*] his disciples, and was saying to them, “The Son of Man [*anthrōpos*] is delivered [or given over, or transmitted, or betrayed: *para-didōmi*] into the hands [*cheir*] of men [*anthrōpos*], and they will kill him. And, (once) he has been killed, with the third day he will rise up [*an-istēmi*].” **But they did not understand** [*a-gnoeō*] **the saying** [*rhēma*], **and they were afraid** [*phobeō*] **to ask him** [or, “fled from asking him”]. [Mark 9:31-32.]

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees—hypocrites!—because you are shutting up [*kleiō*] the kingdom of heaven before men; **for you neither enter (yourselves), nor do you even allow those who are entering to enter (unhindered).**” [Matthew 23:13.]

“The wind [or spirit, or breath: *pneuma*] blows [*pneō*] where it wills [*thelō*], and you hear [*akouō*] its sound [or voice, or speech, or language: *phōné*], but without having seen [or known, or perceived: *eidō*] where it comes from and where it goes; thus (it) is (with) everyone [or everything: *pas*] that has been born of [or has proceeded out of, or issued from: *gennaō*] the Spirit [*pneuma*].” Nicodemus answered and said to (Jesus), “In what way are such persons [or ‘such things’: *tauta*] able [or, ‘How do these persons [or things] have the power’: *dynamai*] to come into being [or ‘be born’: *ginomai*]?” Jesus replied to him (by) saying, “**You are the teacher [*didaskalos*] of Israel, and you do not know [or understand: *ginōskō*] these things [or ‘these persons’: *tauta*].**” [John 3:8-10.]

I included the emphases in the last two passages for the purpose of indicating that the author seems to be calling attention (consciously or unconsciously) to the fact that an esotericist system of religion makes *everyone* in a society more ignorant, even—perhaps especially—the members of the religious elite who enthusiastically promote and maintain the system.

An example of possible “encoded” meanings in the New Testament, and of how one might go about “decrypting” them using a process of cross-referencing

The chapter of 1 Corinthians 14 pertains in general to the subject of “speaking in tongues.” In the attempt to understand that chapter, I think it may be useful to think of “speaking in tongues” as referring to a type of communication that uses a heavily symbolic or metaphorical “language” not ordinarily used or understood by others. Paul exhorts the members of the Corinthian church to take an interest in making sure that all of the other church members actually understand their *meanings* when they express themselves:

[I]f by means of [or “through”: *dia*] the tongue [*glōssa*] you do not utter [more literally, “give”: *didōmi*] meaningful [more literally, “well-marked”: *eu-sémos*, related to the words *séma* and *sémeion*, both of which can mean “sign” or “mark”] speech [or discourse: *logos*], how will it be known [or understood: *ginōskō*] what is being spoken [*laleō*]? For you will be speaking [*laleō*] into the air [*aér*]. It so happens that there are a great many kinds [*genos*] of language [or speech, or “sound”: *phōné*] in the world, and none is soundless [or “lacking in (mere) sound”: *a-phōnos*]; therefore, **if I do not know the meaning** [more literally, “power,” or “force”: *dynamis*] **of the sound** [or language, or speech: *phōné*], I will be a foreigner [more literally, “barbarian”: *barbaros*] to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner [*barbaros*] to me. [1 Corinthians 14:9-11.]

Just a few verses later, Paul writes,

I express (my) thanks [*eu-charisteō*] to God more than any of you (do) (by) speaking [*laleō*] in tongues [*glōssa*]; but in church [or a gathering of people: *ekklésia*] I choose rather to speak [*laleō*] **five** words [*logos*] with my mind [*nous*], so that I might orally instruct [more literally, “sound down upon”: *kat-écheō*] others, than **ten thousand** [or myriad, or innumerable: *myrios*] words [*logos*] in a tongue [*glōssa*]. [1 Corinthians 14:18-19.]

As with all numbers in the Bible, a careful reader must at least entertain the possibility that the numbers “five” and “ten thousand” as they are used in this last passage were meant to have symbolic significance. Moreover, it is conceivable that one might be able to cross-reference this use of the (possibly) symbolic numbers “five” and “ten thousand” with uses of the same numbers in passages from the Old Testament, in an attempt to better understand the intended meanings of the symbols as they are used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, with regard to the symbolic number “ten thousand”:

I do not fear **ten thousands** of [or myriad, or innumerable, or a multitude of: *rebabah*; LXX: *myrias*, a variant of *myrios*] people who have set themselves against me all around. [Psalm 3:6.]

A thousand [*eleph*; LXX: *chilias*] shall fall [*naphal*; LXX: *peseitai*, a form of *piptō*] at your side, **ten thousand** [*rebabah*; LXX: *myrias*] at your right hand; but (danger) will not come near you. [Psalm 91:7.]

One might reasonably argue that, since the word “ten thousand” seems to have been commonly used in both the ancient Hebrew and Greek cultures to generally convey the idea of “a lot,” in a way similar to the way in which people of our time might say “a million,” Paul’s use of the word is not necessarily of great significance. But it strikes me as harder to explain why Paul would choose to refer to the number “five” in particular. It is possible that an answer to that question might be found by examining the Bible’s account of the contest between David and Goliath the Philistine:

Then (David) took his staff in his hand, and chose **five** smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a pouch, his shepherd’s bag. And, sling in hand, he approached the Philistine. ... And David reached his hand into his bag and took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; **the stone sank into his forehead** [or, “was planted in his forehead”], and he **fell** [*naphal*; LXX: *piptō*] **on his face** [LXX: *epi prosōpon autou*] to the ground [or earth: *erets*; LXX: *gé*]. [1 Samuel 17:40,49.]

The fact that “the stone sank into the forehead” of Goliath suggests the possibility that one of Paul’s “five words spoken with the mind”—signifying, perhaps, new meanings given to the symbolism—may have actually been understood to have “penetrated” the mind of the “giant” Goliath (who was perhaps meant to represent the prototypical “literalist” or “materialist”); and, in so doing, it “killed” him: in other words, perhaps, it

led him to reconceptualize his entire inner world and begin again with a new one. That such an episode or general motif may indeed have been what Paul was thinking of when he spoke of the “five words spoken with the mind” is made somewhat more likely by the fact that later in the same chapter Paul writes,

[I]f all should prophesy [*prophéteuō*] [“prophesy,” that is, *instead of* “speaking in tongues”], and an unbeliever [*a-pistos*] or an uninstructed person [or “a private person”: *idiōtēs*] should enter [*eis-erchomai*], he is convicted [or convinced, or rebuked: *elegchō*] by all, he is scrutinized [*ana-krinō*] by all [meaning, in other words, that the outsider is being led to *self*-scrutiny or *self*-examination by all], the secrets [*kryptos*] of his heart [*kardia*] become exposed [or disclosed, or manifest, or revealed: *phaneros*], and so, **having fallen** [*piptō*] **on (his) face** [*epi prosōpon*], he will worship God and declare [or proclaim, or announce: *ap-aggellō*] that God is really among [*en*] you. [1 Corinthians 14:24-25.]

So the symbol or metaphor of “falling on one’s face” is here again repeated, and in such a way that both passages read together suggest that the figure of speech was perhaps being used with a “technical” meaning in mind that would not have been obvious to the ordinary, uninstructed reader, but may have been recognized by readers who had already been “initiated” to some extent. What I think Paul may have been trying to suggest was that the “unbelievers” or “uninstructed persons” were to be thought of as “Philistines” who were in need of “slaying”: in other words, perhaps, in need of “being converted to a different way of thinking.” Moreover, this would apparently have occurred by means of the “secrets” or “hidden things” (*kryptos*) of the “heart” (*kardia*)—which may have been understood to correspond, at least in part, to “inner meanings”—being made revealed (or made exposed, or made to emerge) from within the “outer meanings”; or, to put it another way, from within the *minds* of those persons who had been *embracing* the “outer meanings”; and these outer meanings or outer persons would have been symbolized by or associated with the “giant” (and, more specifically, the “forehead” or “face” of the “giant”). But if the number “five” had in fact been intended to convey this kind of symbolic significance to at least some of the members of Paul’s audience, then this would make it more likely that Paul likewise intended that the number “ten thousand” would convey some kind of symbolic significance as well, so that there would be symmetry between the two numbers. And such a possibility is made still more likely by the fact that Psalm 3:6—which, again, says, “I do not fear ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around”—is spoken in the voice of “David” (although not in the context of his slaying of Goliath).

“Imprisonment” or “bondage” in the Bible understood as a metaphor signifying the inability to clearly communicate one’s meaning

In his epistles, the apostle Paul repeatedly makes reference to “bonds,” or “chains,” or “feters,” or “imprisonment.” I believe he likely intended words such as these to be understood by the reader as metaphors, used for the purpose of reminding the reader that what he was writing should not be taken completely at face value.

In Ephesians 6:18-20, Paul writes,

Keep vigilant with all perseverance, and (make) supplication for all of the saints, and also for me, that utterance [or meaning, or (the) word, or (the) message: *logos*] may be given to me in (the) **opening** [*anoixis*] of my **mouth** [*stoma*] **with forthrightness** [or plainness, or candor, or openness, or frankness, or boldness, or freedom, or confidence, or courage: *parrésia*], **to make known** [*gnōrizō*] **the mystery** [or secret doctrine, or secret teaching, or hidden meaning, or inner meaning: *mystérion*] **of the gospel** [or good message, or good news: *eu-aggelion*], **for the sake of** [*hyper*] **which** [*hou*, referring to “the mystery of the gospel”] **I am an ambassador** [or “I am an elder”: *presbeuō*] **in chains** [or “in bonds,” or “in bondage”; more literally, “in a chain”: *en halysei*]; **so that in it** [that is, “in making known the mystery”] **I might speak freely** [or speak forthrightly, or speak plainly, or speak frankly, or speak candidly, or speak openly, or speak boldly, or speak confidently, or speak courageously: *parrésiazomai*, related to the noun *parrésia*], **as I ought** [*dei*] **to speak** [or communicate: *laleō*].

Notice the juxtaposition of the symbol of “chains” or “bondage,” on the one hand, and the idea of speaking “freely” or “without restriction,” on the other.

There are close parallels between this passage and Colossians 4:3-4, in which Paul writes,

[P]ray for us also, so that God might **open** [*anoigō*] to us **a door** [*thyra*] **for the utterance** [or the meaning, or the message, or the word: *logos*], **to speak** [or communicate: *laleō*] **the mystery** [or secret doctrine, or secret teaching, or hidden meaning, or inner meaning: *mystérion*] **of Christ—also on account of** [or because of: *dia*] **which** [*ho*, referring to the word *mystérion*, meaning “mystery”] **I have been bound** [or imprisoned, or hindered, or restricted, or compelled, or obligated, or constrained: *deō*]**—so that I might make it** [that is, “the mystery”] **clear** [or expose it to view, or reveal it, or make it public, or make it plain, or make it apparent, or make it understood: *phaneroō*], **as I ought** [*dei*] **to speak** [or communicate: *laleō*].

The Greek word *anoixis*, meaning “opening,” is the noun form of the verb *anoigō*, meaning “to open.” So a comparison of the two passages suggests that the “opening” of Paul’s “mouth” spoken of in Ephesians 6:18-20 should be regarded as equivalent to the “opening of a door” spoken of in Colossians 4:3-4; and so the latter passage seems to indicate that whether or not Paul would be able to “open his mouth” or “speak openly” would (since the matter was “in God’s hands,” so to speak, while Paul’s “hands were tied”) depend partly upon whether or not the *opportunity* was available to him to do so—that is to say, whether or not a particular person happened to be *receptive to* the “mystery” (or “secret teaching,” or “hidden meaning,” or “inner meaning”: *mystérion*) that Paul would have wanted to share with him.

Also, a close look at the language used in Colossians 4:3-4 reveals that Paul is saying that it was because of the “mystery” or “inner meaning” (*mystérion*) contained in the gospel of Christ—and *not* necessarily because of the *actual, literal, verbal utterance* of that “mystery” or “inner meaning”—or of any meaning, for that matter—that he had been “bound” (*deō*). And that in turn suggests that the “imprisonment” or “restriction” of

which he speaks was not due to external forces or factors (for example, the Roman authorities)—at least, it was not due *directly* to external forces or factors. In other words, it would have been Paul who was *restricting himself* in response to the existence of those external forces or factors. According to this interpretation, Paul would have preferred not to *have to* restrain himself from speaking freely and openly; but, so long as those external forces or factors existed, he felt that he had no real choice. (Or, perhaps, the “restriction” was internal but involuntary.)

If the interpretation that I am offering is correct, then it would cast doubt upon the correctness of the way in which Christians have traditionally read passages from the New Testament such as these in which Paul speaks of his having been “imprisoned” or “bound” or “fettered”—namely, in such a way that Paul is understood to be referring to his literal imprisonment by Roman authorities. And that in turn raises the possibility that Christians over the centuries have misunderstood the meaning of their own scriptures at a very basic level.

The interpretation that I offer is supported by Paul’s use of the Greek word *deō* in Colossians 4:3-4, which, according to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, generally means “to bind, to fetter, to tie, to shackle, to imprison, to fasten”; but it also corresponds to “a Chaldean and rabbinical idiom” that has the meaning “to forbid, to prohibit, to declare to be illicit.” The Greek word *deō* is the word that the translators of the ancient Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament would usually use to translate the Hebrew word *asar*, which has a similar range of meanings of “to bind, to tie, to imprison, to hold, to fasten”; and, according to the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, this Hebrew word *asar* can be “figurative of obligation of oath or vow.” Similarly, according to Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon, *asar* can mean “to bind a bond, or prohibition upon oneself, i.e. to bind oneself with a vow of abstinence, promising to abstain from certain things otherwise permitted.” These “things” may have been understood by Paul and certain other Christian Jews to include the free and open communication of certain types of knowledge, or of certain beliefs, or ideas, or thoughts.

These lexical definitions increase the likelihood that it was *self-restraint*, or *self-censorship*, or else some difficulty in successfully conveying the meaning that Paul wished to convey (causing him to be “tongue-tied”), and not *direct, external, forcible* restraint, that was the cause of Paul’s *figurative* “imprisonment” or “bondage.” Thus, when in the final verse of his epistle to the Colossians (Colossians 4:18), Paul concludes the epistle by writing, “Remember my fetters [or bonds, or bindings, or shackles: *desmos*, derived from *deō*, meaning ‘to bind’],” I think it would be reasonable to surmise that he meant for this to be read as something like, “Do not forget that I am still unable to speak completely freely and openly and clearly”—for whatever reason—“so that my true meaning, or full meaning, must continue to be partially veiled for the time being.”

The equivalence of “Babel” and “Babylon” as symbols representing religious esotericism regarded as a type of system (as indicated by the association between “Babel” and the idea of a “confusing of language”)

The famous story of the “Tower of Babel” related in Genesis 11:1-9 is actually, I believe, a mythical account of the origins of the esotericist religious system:

And all [*kol*] **the earth** [or land: *erets*; LXX: *gé*] **was of a single** [or united: *echad*; LXX: *hen*, a form of *heis*] **language** [more literally, “lip” or “edge”: *saphah*; LXX: *cheilos*, in the singular number] **and of a single** [or united: *echad*; LXX: *mia*, a form of *heis*] **speech** [or, “a single discourse,” or “a single account,” or “a single message,” or “words (that were) single”: *dabarim*, the plural of *dabar*, which can mean “word”; LXX: *phōné*]. **And it came about in their moving from** [some translations have “to” instead of “from”] **the east** [or “early times,” or “ancient times”: *qedem*; LXX: *anatolé*, derived from *ana-tellō*, which means “to rise up” (as with the sun)] **that they found** [or discovered, or happened upon: *matsa*; LXX: *heuriskō*] **a valley** [or a plain; more literally, “a split,” or “a cleaving,” or “a division,” or “an opening,” or “a breach”: *biqah*, derived from *baqa*, meaning “to split, to break open”; LXX: *pedion*] **in the land** [*erets*; LXX: *gé*] **of Shinar; and they dwelt** [or settled, or “sat”: *yashab*; LXX: *kat-oikeō*] **there. And they said, (each) man** [*ish*; LXX: *anthrōpos*] **to his neighbor** [or companion, or ‘one who is near’: *rea*; LXX: *plésion*], **“Come, let us make bricks** [more literally, ‘make white (things),’ or ‘make white (things) whiter,’ or ‘whiten white (things):’ *laban* and *lebenah*], **and burn** [or bake, or scorch: *saraph*; LXX: *optaō*] **them thoroughly** [LXX: *pyri*, meaning ‘in fire’].” **And brick** [or “the white (thing)”: *lebenah*; LXX: *plinthos*] **was to them for stone** [*eben*; LXX: *lithos*], **and asphalt** [or tar, or bitumen: *chemar*; LXX: *asphaltos*] **was to them for mortar** [or cement, or clay: *chomer*; LXX: *pélos*]. **And they said, “Come, let us build** [*banah*; LXX: *oiko-domeō*] **for ourselves a city** [*iyr*; LXX: *polis*], **and a tower** [or castle, or fortified structure: *migdal*; LXX: *pyrgos*] **(with its) top** [or head: *rosh*; LXX: *kephalé*] **in the heavens; and let us make** [*asah*; LXX: *poieō*] **for ourselves a name** [*shem*; LXX: *onoma*], **lest we be scattered** [or dispersed: *puwts*; LXX: *dia-speirō*] **over the face** [*paneh*; LXX: *prosōpon*] **of the whole** [*kol*; LXX: *pas*] **earth** [*erets*; LXX: *gé*]. **And the Lord** [*yahweh*] **came down** [*yarad*; LXX: *kata-bainō*] **to see the city** [*iyr*; LXX: *polis*] **and the tower** [*migdal*; LXX: *pyrgos*] **that the sons of men** [or of man, or of mankind, or of “the Adam”: *ha adam*] **had built** [*banah*; LXX: *oiko-domeō*]. **And the Lord said, “Behold, the people** [*am*; LXX: *genos*] **(are) one** [or single, or united: *echad*; LXX: *hen*], **and (there is) one** [or a single, or a united: *echad*; LXX: *hen*] **language** [*saphah*; LXX: *cheilos*] **for all (people)** [or the whole: *kol*; LXX: *pas*]; **and, beginning** [*chalal*, which can also mean ‘to pierce, to penetrate, to bore a hole’; LXX: *archomai*] **by doing this, now nothing will be hidden** [or impossible, or inaccessible, or impenetrable, or walled off, or fenced off, or withheld, or held back, or secure: *batsar*; LXX: *ek-leipō*, which means ‘omit, leave out, leave off, fail,’ and is the source of the English word ‘eclipse’] **(from them), and everything** [*kol*; LXX: *panta*] **that they propose** [or imagine, or intend: *zamam*; LXX: *epi-tithémi*, meaning ‘attempt’ or ‘apply oneself to’], **they will do** [or make, or accomplish: *asah*; LXX: *poieō*]. **Let us go down** [*yarad*; LXX: *kata-bainō*] **there and confuse** [or mix together, or confound, or mingle, or pour together: *balal*; LXX: *syg-cheō*] **their language** [*saphah*; LXX: *glōssan*, a singular form of *glōssa*, which more literally means ‘tongue’], **so that one man may not understand** [or listen to, or hear: *shama* (related to *shem*, meaning ‘name’); LXX: *akouō*] **the language** [or speech: *saphah*; LXX: *phōné*, which can also mean ‘voice’] **of his neighbor** [or companion, or ‘one who is near’: *rea*; LXX: *plésion*].” **And the Lord scattered** [or dispersed: *puwts*; LXX: *dia-speirō*] **them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they left off** [or were made to

stop, or failed at: *chadal*; LXX: *pauō*] **building** [*banah*; LXX: *oiko-domeō*] **the city**. **Therefore its name** [*shem*; LXX: *onoma*] **was called** [*qara*; LXX: *kaleō*] **Babel** [*babel*; LXX: *sygchysis*, meaning “Confusion”], **because there the Lord confused** [*balal*; LXX: *syg-cheō*, which more literally means “to pour together”] **the language** [*saphah*; LXX: *cheilē*, a plural form of *cheilos*] **of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered** [or dispersed: *puwts*; LXX: *dia-speirō*] **them over the face of the whole earth**. [Genesis 11:1-9.]

As confirmation that the translation of the Hebrew word *batsar* as “hidden” in the preceding passage is correct (translators often choose the word “impossible”—which I do not argue is necessarily *incorrect*), compare Jeremiah 33:3, in which the Lord says,

Call to me and I will answer, and will make manifest [or show, or make understood, or tell plainly, or make conspicuous, or openly announce: *nagad*; LXX: *ap-aggellō*] **to you great and hidden** [or inaccessible: *batsar*] **(things) that you did not know** [*yada*; LXX: *ginōskō*].

I believe that the “Babel” spoken of in Genesis 11:1-9 was actually understood by the authors of both the Old and New Testaments to be equivalent to the idea of “Babylon”—the same “mystery Babylon” (or “symbolic Babylon,” or “secret Babylon,” or “inner Babylon”: *mystérion babylōn*) that is spoken of in Revelation 17:5. It does not require any great creative insight to reach this conclusion: The Hebrew word/name that English translations of the Old Testament ordinarily translate as “Babylon” is actually *babel*; the English word/name “Babylon” is of Greek derivation. So the authors of the Old Testament were making it quite evident that they regarded the “Babel” of the “Tower of Babel” story as being the same conceptual entity as “Babylon” whenever they denounced the latter.

In fact, the verse I just quoted, Jeremiah 33:3—speaking of the “making manifest” of “hidden things”—occurs in the context of describing the ongoing struggle against the “Chaldeans” (i.e., “Babylonians”). It must be understood that the “Babylonian captivity,” which supposedly ended with the conquest of Babylon by the Persians and Medes and the return of the Judahite exiles to build the Second Temple in Jerusalem, *is a figurative notion*, and so *never really took place—or ended—in the historical past*. My sense is that the understanding of the New Testament authors was that “those who were devoted to truth” were thought to be “imprisoned” or “held captive” within “Babylon”—another name for the “present Jerusalem,” or the *merely* “earthly Jerusalem” (as opposed to the “new Jerusalem,” which, at least in its manifested form, I think was understood to be both “earthly” and “heavenly” at once). And this “imprisonment” or “captivity” meant that these “devotees of truth” (in their own minds, anyway) felt compelled to continue to speak in a cryptically symbolic form of speech—with the result being the misleading and confusing of others—for the time being. The “devotees of truth” may have been collectively represented by the symbol of “Israel,” since in John 1:47 Jesus implicitly defines a “true Israelite” as a person “in whom there is no deceit [or guile, or subtility, or trickery: *dolos*].” A distinction similar to the one made between “apparent Israelites” and “true Israelites” may have been made between “apparent Judahites” and “true Judahites,” based, for example, on what Paul writes in Romans 2:28-29:

For a (true) Jew [or Judahite: *ioudaios*] is not the (one that is) apparent [or visible, or outward: *en tō phanerō*]; neither is (true) circumcision the (one that is) apparent [*en tō phanerō*], in the flesh [*sarx*]. But a (true) Jew is the (one that is) in secret [or hidden: *en tō kryptō*], and (whose) circumcision is of the heart [*kardia*]: in spirit [*pneuma*], not in letter [*gramma*]; of whom the praise [or approval, or commendation: *epainos*] (comes) not from men [*anthrōpos*], but from God.

According to this theoretical model, “Judahites,” like all other “Israelites,” would be “exiles” from the truth (with “truth” perhaps understood to be symbolized by the “holy land” or the “promised land”); but those “Judahites” and “Israelites” inhabiting the symbolic “present Jerusalem” or “Babylon” may have been viewing themselves (partly unconsciously) as “insiders” working within a worldwide (and largely unconscious) system of oppression bound together by the power of the Lie. I think the understanding of the authors of the New Testament may have been that the symbolic “walls”—thus forming a kind of “spiritual body”—of the “heavenly Jerusalem,” of which the “true Israelites” and “true Judahites” would have been inhabitants, or “members,” may have been deemed to have existed *within* the symbolic “walls”—or the “fleshly body”—of “Babylon,” i.e., the “present Jerusalem.” Thus, the “Jerusalem above” (or the “new Jerusalem,” or “heavenly Jerusalem,” or “spiritual Jerusalem”) would have corresponded to the idea of an “inner body,” while “Babylon” (or the “present Jerusalem”) would have corresponded to the idea of an “outer body.”

According to such a theoretical model, at the end of the then-current “world-age” both the “Judahite Israelites” and the “non-Judahite Israelites” would have been “called upon” by angels (which might be a “poetic” way of saying that numerous persons would have made the same decision at the same time), to “come out of (Babylon),” as Revelation 18:4 puts it. Since the “walls” or “body” of the “heavenly Jerusalem” would have been located, so to speak, *within* the “walls” or “body” of “Babylon” or the “present Jerusalem,” this “call” would actually have been representing a call for “true Israelites” and “true Judahites” to “*come out of hiding*,” so to speak. One can find a number of passages from the Old Testament that suggest this, such as the following:

Come out [*yatsa*; LXX: *ex-erchomai*] **from Babylon** [Hebrew *babel*], **flee** [*barach*; LXX: *pheugō*] **from the Chaldeans** [i.e., Babylonians], **with a shouting** [or singing, or joyful: *rinnah*; LXX: *euphrosyné*, meaning “joy, gladness”] **voice** [*qol*; LXX: *phōnē*] **declare** [or proclaim, or tell plainly, or expose, or disclose, or make public, or make conspicuous, or make manifest, or make apparent, or make known: *nagad*; LXX: *an-aggellō* or *an-angellō*] **this, make (it) heard** [*shama*; LXX: *akoustos*], **send (it) forth** [or go forth: *yatsa*; LXX: *ap-aggellō* or *ap-angellō*] **to the end** [*qatseh*; LXX: *eschatos*] **of the earth; say, “The Lord has redeemed** [or rescued: *gaal*; LXX: *rhyomai*] **his servant Jacob!”** [Isaiah 48:20.]

Flee [or move (yourselves), or remove (yourselves): *nud*; LXX: *ap-allotrioō*, meaning “become alienated”] **from the midst** [or middle, or center: *tavek*; LXX: *mesos*] **of Babylon** [Hebrew *babel*], **and come out** [*yatsa*; LXX: *ex-erchomai*] **of the land of the Chaldeans** [i.e., Babylonians], **and become as he-goats** [*attud*; LXX: *drakontes*,

meaning “dragons”] before a flock (of sheep). For behold, I am raising and making go up against Babylon [Hebrew *babel*] a company of great nations, from the north; and from there, they will set out to take her. Their arrows [more literally, “piercers,” or “cutters,” or “dividers”: *chets*] will be as from a man of great skill [or “a man of great wisdom”: *gibbor* and *sakal*]; none will return empty-handed. [Jeremiah 50:8-9.]

The voice [or speech: *qol*; LXX: *phōné*] of those who flee [*nus*; LXX: *pheugō*] and have escaped [*paliyt*; LXX: *ana-sōzō*] from the land of Babylon [Hebrew *babel*] (is) to declare [or to openly proclaim, or to make publicly known: *nagad*; LXX: *an-aggellō* or *an-angellō*] in Zion the vengeance of the Lord our God, the vengeance of [or for] his temple. [Jeremiah 50:28.]

Also, from the New Testament:

And I heard [*akouō*] another [or a different: *allos*] voice [or speech, or language: *phōné*] (coming) out of heaven, saying, “Come out [*ex-erchomai*] from (Babylon), my people [*laos*], that you might not partake of [or participate in, or share in, or be joined together with: *syg-koinōneō*] her sins, and that you might not receive [*lambanō*] her afflictions [or plagues: *plégé*]; for her sins have been piled up [or joined together: *kollaō*] as high as heaven, and God has remembered her evil deeds [*a-dikéma*]. Render [or give back, or pay back, or restore, or sell: *apo-didōmi*] to her just as she has rendered [*apo-didōmi*]**—and make double** [*diploō*] **the (things that are) double** [*ta dipla*], **in keeping with her (own) works** [or deeds: *ergon*]. In the cup [*potérion*] that she has mixed [*kerāō* or *kerannymi*], mix [*kerāō* or *kerannymi*] double [or ‘a double (portion)’: *diploous* or *diploos*] for her.” [Revelation 18:4-6.]

In the last passage, the phrase “and make double the things that are double, in keeping with her own works” was likely meant to be read as an allusion to the distinction that symbolic or mystery “Babylon” (representing, I believe, the entire esotericist religious system) would accustom its “initiates” to make between the “inner meaning” and the “outer meaning” of a symbol or parable—in other words, an allusion to the systematic *duplicity* (literally understood) of symbolic “Babylon.” “The things that are double” might be a reference to the *ambiguity* found in the esoteric symbolism; if so, the “making double” of those “double things” might have been meant (consciously or unconsciously) to refer to the elimination of any inherent ambiguity by means of *analysis*—that is, by “shining the light of day” upon the ambiguity of meaning that symbolic “Babylon” had worked so hard to maintain and use to its advantage by concealing it and attempting to divert attention from it by outsiders. In other words, the author may have meant to indicate that those who were opposed to the works of symbolic “Babylon” would need to learn how to make the very same sorts of *semantic distinctions* within individual words and other verbal symbols that her “initiates” were already in the habit of making—but now for the purpose of *ending* “Babylonian” esotericism once and for all. (At the same time, the authors of the New Testament may have been trying to inject *new* “inner meanings” into the esoteric symbolism that they disseminated and that had already been disseminated before them: meanings which would be *partially* hostile to esotericism.) In addition to this, consider that the Greek word *kerāō* (or *kerannymi*) that is used in this

passage has a range of meanings very similar to that of the Hebrew word *balal* (the word found in Genesis 11:7,9, in the telling of the “Tower of Babel” story), as both of these words can have the meanings “to pour together, to commingle, to mix, to confuse, to confound.” Moreover, the reference to the “piling up” or “joining together” of “Babylon’s sins” “as high as heaven” may have been intended to serve as an allusion to the piling up or joining together of the “bricks” (see Genesis 11:3) used to erect the Tower of Babel, “with its top in the heavens” (see Genesis 11:4). It is thus conceivable that the author of Revelation 18:4-6 conceived of every inhabitant of “Babylon” as constituting a single “brick” in the “Tower of Babel,” so that when *all* people finally “fled” or “came out” from “Babylon,” the “Tower of Babel” would effectively “collapse.” When all of this evidence is put together, it leads to the probable conclusion that **the author of Revelation 18:4-6 was symbolically depicting the “confusing of language” or “mixing of language,” said to have originally occurred at “Babel” or “Babylon,” as being undone.**

One can find numerous passages in the Bible that refer to a “trap” or a “snare” contained within the Biblical religion (with this same “trap” or “snare” being found within other esotericist religions, I suspect). I offer the hypothesis that it was the understanding (conscious or unconscious) of those who used this metaphor, or at least their hope, that the esotericist form of religion would be allowed to develop and ripen; and then, when the time was right (however that would be determined), and relatively suddenly, “the trap would be sprung” (or, to put it another way, it would “spring” of its own accord once it had reached some kind of ripeness or maturity), and the age-old system of “Babylonian” esotericism would come to an end in one fell swoop. Certain Biblical passages suggest that this process may have been understood to involve one type of person (and perhaps also some set of meanings associated with that type of person) “getting caught” in the trap, as the result of which another type of person or set of meanings would at the same time “escape” from this same trap; and I think both of these “types of persons” might conceivably have been understood to co-exist *within a single individual*. The complete unfolding of this process would apparently leave in a state of dismay the inhabitants of symbolic “Jerusalem”—that is, the symbolic “*earthly* or *present* Jerusalem,” i.e., “*Babylon*,” which would have been understood to include *within it*, in its “interior,” the “*heavenly* Jerusalem.” Their dismay would be the result of their having grown too comfortable with the deception that was intrinsic to a mythical/esotericist system (although they would not have fully recognized at the time that this is what had happened). By the end of the process, the people would come to see that the esotericist mystification promulgated by their religion had been viewed by its own prophets—consciously or unconsciously—merely as a temporary but (allegedly) necessary evil. They would come to see that the mystification was not expected to last forever; and that it did *not* in fact constitute some inherently “superior” or “more profound” way of knowing about God or ultimate reality (which is how religious mystification is usually justified). Here are some of the passages that give support to such an hypothesis:

I laid a snare [or set a trap: *yaqosh*] **for you** [LXX: “They will set out against you” or “They will make an attempt on you”: *epi-tithémi*] **and you are taken** [or caught, or captured: *lakad*; LXX: *aliskomai*, which was also used as a legal term meaning “to be

convicted”], **O Babylon** [Hebrew: *babel*], **and you do not see it** [or perceive it, or understand it, or know it: *yada*; LXX: *ginōskō*]. **You are found** [or discovered, or investigated, or explored: *matsa*; LXX: *heuriskō*] **and also caught** [or grasped, or taken hold of: *taphas*; LXX: *lambanō*], **because you strive against** [or resist, or oppose: *garah*; LXX: *ant-histēmi*] **the Lord**. [Jeremiah 50:24 (LXX: Jeremiah 27:24).]

Let their own table [*shulchan*: a skin or leather mat spread out on the ground; LXX: *trapeza*] **before them become a snare** [or trap: *pach*: often used to refer to a fowler’s net that would be spread out on the ground; LXX: *pagis*]; **and (let) their contentedness** [or complacency, or satisfaction, or self-satisfaction; more literally, “soundness,” or “completeness,” or “wholeness,” or “peace”: *shalom*] **(become) a trap** [or snare: *moqesh*, derived from the verb *yaqosh*; LXX: *skandalon*, which, in addition to its original meaning of “snare,” can also mean “stumbling-block,” or “temptation,” or “offense”]. [Psalm 69:22 (LXX: Psalm 68:22). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 11:9.]

Our soul [*nephesh*; LXX: *psychē*] **has escaped** [or slipped through: *malat*; LXX: *rhyomai*, meaning “to be rescued”] **like a bird** [*tsippor*; LXX: *strouthion*, meaning “sparrow”] **from the snare** [*pach*; LXX: *pagis*] **of the ensnarer** [or fowler: *yaqosh*; LXX: *théreuō*, meaning “to hunt”]; **the snare** [*pach*; LXX: *pagis*] **is torn** [or broken apart, or broken in pieces, or disintegrated: *shabar*; LXX: *syn-tribō*], **and we have escaped** [or gotten loose, or slipped through: *malat*; LXX: *rhyomai*, meaning “to be rescued”]. [Psalm 124:7 (LXX: Psalm 123:7).]

And (the Lord) will become a sanctuary [more literally, “will be set apart”: *miqdawsh* (perhaps in the sense of being “inaccessible”); LXX: *hagiasma*], **and a stone** [*eben*; LXX: *lithos*] **for tripping** [*negeph*; LXX: *proskomma*], **and a rock** [*tsur*; LXX: *petra*] **for stumbling** [or falling: *mikshol*; LXX: *ptōma*] **to both houses** [*bayith*; LXX: *oikos*] **of Israel, a snare** [*pach*; LXX: *pagis*] **and a trap** [*moqesh*; LXX: *koilōma*, meaning “pit” or “hollow place” or “cavity” or “hiding place,” and *eg-kathēmai*, meaning “lying in ambush”] **for the inhabitants** [*yashab*] **of Jerusalem**. [Isaiah 8:14.]

Observe that when read together Psalm 69:22 and Psalm 124:7 seem to be envisioning a *single* snare or trap in which *everyone* had initially been caught—but, as I just indicated, the authors of these passages may have believed that at some point everyone would eventually be able to “get loose” from it. In other words, I think it may have been believed that *everyone* would “escape” from the “trap,” or else *no one* would. According to such an hypothesis, the entirety of persons affiliated with an esotericist religion (which would have effectively included all human beings) would have corresponded to the symbolic “inhabitants of Jerusalem” referred to in Isaiah 8:14; but once those inhabitants had become able to “get loose from” or “slip through” the “outer covering” of “Jerusalem”—signified by the symbol of “Babylon”—they may have been understood to become inhabitants of “the heavenly Jerusalem” or “the Jerusalem above,” but without needing to “leave the city,” so to speak. Some persons, such as the authors of the Psalms, and the Christians whom Paul was addressing in Galatians 4:22-31 (which I quote just

below), would presumably have come to *identify in advance* with this “inner Jerusalem” or “heavenly Jerusalem”; but the “inner Jerusalem” could not be openly *revealed* until the time at which *all* people had “escaped” from “Babylon.” And the “trap” or “snare” from which they would be escaping would, I believe, most likely have been meant to refer to the *generally* disseminated repository of esoteric symbols (or, to put it another way, the esotericist mode of discourse), such that it would be the *differences* between the *meanings* that could be assigned to the *same symbols* at different times that would account for the fact that, although people might at first be “held captive” by the symbols when those symbols were given one set of meanings, people would still be able to “get loose from” or “slip through” what had previously been confining them—once those same symbols were assigned a different set of meanings. (And those who were able to see such a possible outcome in advance would already have had an *unconscious* understanding of what the symbols were *potentially* capable of meaning; but the fact that they remained esotericists—i.e., “prophets”—would indicate that this understanding must never have risen to the level of conscious awareness.)

One of the most unexpectedly remarkable and compelling passages to be found in the entire Bible is Revelation 18:11-13. Once one is willing to entertain the hypothesis that the symbol of “mystery Babylon” may have actually been intended (consciously or unconsciously) to represent the entire phenomenon of esotericist religion, understood as a type of societal arrangement, it becomes possible to recognize the bitter irony with which, I believe, the author may have been condemning the oppressive system of world control made possible by the deliberate obscuration of the meanings of word-symbols. He forces the reader to endure a tedious litany of what I think must be regarded as cryptic esoteric word-symbols, none of which he supplies with definitions:

And the merchants [or traders: *emporos*] of the earth weep and mourn over (Babylon), since no one buys their merchandise any longer: merchandise of gold, and of silver, and of precious (gem)stone, and of pearls, and of fine linen, and of purple (fabric), and of silk, and of crimson (fabric), and every (kind of) citron wood, and every (kind of) article of ivory, and every (kind of) article of precious wood, and of bronze, and of iron, and of marble; and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and myrrh, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep; and of horses, and of chariots, and of bodies; and souls [*psyché*] of men [or human beings: *anthrōpos*].

But even without definitions, the way in which the sentence is structured is revealing. By ending the sentence with “bodies” and “souls of men,” the suggestion is being subtly offered that the “trafficking” in esoteric word-symbols such as the ones being enumerated has resulted in the *enslavement* (both figurative and literal) of human beings. This serves to remind the reader of the deadly seriousness of the problem of esotericism and the true enormity of the evil caused by it: partly by showing how easy it is for some human beings to transform other human beings into mere ciphers or symbols in their minds (even including, I would point out, as evil “Babylonians,” or “Egyptians,” or “Canaanites,” or “Hamites,” or “traders”); but mostly by showing how the ideas of freedom and meaning are inextricably bound together: Those who do not understand the intended meanings of the words and the language that other people use or have used will

always be at the mercy of those who *claim* to understand it, and who are happy to do everyone else's interpreting for them (as well as their translating, which is a kind of interpreting).

This contrast between freedom and slavery that is suggested by Revelation 18:11-13 can in turn be related to the conceptual distinction that Paul makes in Galatians 4:22-31 between Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac:

For it is written that Abraham had two [*dyo* or *duo*] sons, one from the slave woman and one from the free (woman). But the (son) of the slave woman has been born [or engendered: *gennaō*] in conformity with [or "in accordance with," or "corresponding to": *kata*] flesh [*sarx*], and the (son) of the free (woman) through the promise [or the offer: *ep-aggelia* or *ep-angelia*]**—which (figures) are (serving as) allegories** [*allégoreō*]. For these (women) are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai, bringing forth [*gennaō*] children unto slavery: this is Hagar. Now Hagar—Mount Sinai—is in Arabia, but corresponds to the present [*nyn*] Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above [*anō*] is free, (and she) is our mother [*méter*]. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one, one not bringing forth [*tiktō*]; break out [or burst forth: *rhégnymi*] and shout [*boaō*], (you) not in childbirth [or suffering labor pains: *ōdinō*]; because many more (are) the children of the desolate one [*erémos*] than of the one having the husband [or man: *anér*]." Now you, brothers, corresponding to [or "in accordance with," or "after the fashion of": *kata*] Isaac, are children of promise [*ep-aggelia* or *ep-angelia*]. But, just as at that time the one having been born [*gennaō*] in conformity with [*kata*] flesh [*sarx*] persecuted [*diōkō*] the one (having been born) in conformity with [*kata*] spirit [*pneuma*], so too is it now [*nyn*]. But what does the scripture [*graphé*] say? "Cast out [*ek-ballō*] the slave and her son; for by no means will the son of the slave woman inherit [*kléronomeō*] with the son of the free (woman)." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free (woman).

As I discuss a bit further below, it is likely that the ideas of "being born in conformity with the flesh" and "being a son of the slave woman" were understood to refer to a person's having a knowledge solely of the more "outer meanings" of the scriptures, while those of "being born in conformity with the Spirit," "being a son of the free woman," and "being a child of promise" were understood to refer to having a knowledge of the more "inner meanings" of the scriptures as well.

1 Peter 5:13 is another verse that might tell us something about what the symbol of "Babylon" meant to the authors of the New Testament. At the end of the epistle, the author writes,

She (who is) in Babylon, chosen (along with you) [*syn-eklektos*], sends greetings....

This should strike the reader, and especially the ordinary Christian reader, as an exceedingly odd thing to say—at least after he or she has become willing to entertain the notion that the authors of the New Testament, even including the authors of the epistles, may have been using esoteric techniques in their writings. It is difficult to believe that the author of 1 Peter would have been referring to a geographic location when he spoke of "Babylon," if for no other reason than the fact that the symbol of "Babylon" had the

great significance among early Christians that it did. If the author mentioned “Babylon” at all, one would reasonably expect that he would at least have provided the qualification that he had the geographic Babylon in mind rather than “mystery Babylon,” to avoid any possible confusion about the matter among his audience. The verse becomes even more suspicious when one considers the author’s very conspicuous choice not to associate “her” with any personal name.

The “She” spoken of in 1 Peter 5:13 may have been an allusion to Abraham’s slave-concubine Hagar, who, as Paul states in Galatians 4:25 (quoted just above), “corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children”; and, as I have already explained, I think the “present Jerusalem” was understood by the authors of the New Testament to be equivalent to “Babylon.” Or, alternatively (or in addition), “She” may have been meant to be read as a reference to the figure of the “harlot of Babylon”—which symbol might itself have been alluding to another famous biblical harlot, “Rahab,” who is described in chapter 2 of the Book of Joshua as “hiding” the Israelite messengers sent to spy out the city of Jericho prior to its destruction by the Israelites. Such an association would be made more likely if one saw the leveling of the walls of “Jericho” (see Joshua chapter 6) as a kind of symbolic “prefiguring” of the leveling of the walls of “Babylon” or “Babel” that is figuratively described in, for example, Jeremiah 51:58—which I believe may in turn have been intended to serve as a figurative prediction of the very real and *non-figurative* leveling of the *figurative* “walls” of “mystery Babylon.” Additional support for such a connection can be found in Jeremiah 52:8: “[T]he army of the Chaldeans [i.e., Babylonians] pursued the king [of Judah] and overtook Zedekiah [the king of Judah] in the desert-plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him.” The idea meant to be conveyed here was, perhaps, that the former victory by the “Israelites” against “Jericho” had in essence been reversed, and that the “Judahites” were once again under the control of the system of oppressive esotericism from which—according to the *fictionally* “*historic*” terms of the Biblical narrative, that is—they had previously departed by leaving “Egypt,” and had extirpated from their midst in “Canaan” (with this having been visually dramatized most memorably by their bringing down the “walls of Jericho”).

An interesting connection appears between two of the passages quoted above. Again, Jeremiah 52:8—the passage I just quoted—says,

[T]he army [*chayil*; LXX: *dynamis*] of the Chaldeans [i.e., Babylonians] pursued [or chased after; more figuratively, “persecuted” or “harassed”]: *radaph*; LXX: *kata-diōkō*] the king [of Judah] and overtook [*nasag*; LXX: *kata-lambanō*] Zedekiah [the king of Judah] in the desert-plains [*arabah*; LXX: *peran*, meaning “far side”] of Jericho, and all his army [or force, or power, or resources, or wealth, or substance: *chayil*; LXX: *dynamis*] was scattered [or dispersed: *puwts*; LXX: *dia-speirō*] from him.⁵

In Galatians 4:29, Paul writes,

⁵ Note the fact that in 1 Corinthians 14:11, quoted above in the main text, the Greek word *dynamis*, literally meaning “force, power, strength,” is used by Paul in the sense of “meaning.”

But, just as at that time the one having been born in conformity with flesh persecuted [or harassed; more literally, “pursued” or “chased after”]: *diōkō*] the one (having been born) in conformity with spirit, so too is it now [*nyn*].

The Hebrew word *radaph* and the Greek word *diōkō* appear to have a more or less equivalent range of meanings: “to pursue, chase after, follow after, persecute, harass.” In fact, according to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, the word *diōkō* is a Greek word commonly used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *radaph* (a 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that seems to have influenced the authors of the New Testament).⁶ This correspondence between words suggests an association between the symbolic “Babylon” referred to in Jeremiah 52:8 and “the son of the slave woman” referred to in Galatians 4:29; and also an association between the symbolic “Jerusalem” (signified by “Judah”) referred to in Jeremiah 52:8 and “the son of the free woman” referred to in Galatians 4:29. But since in Galatians 4:25 Paul writes that “Hagar and her children” (represented by “the son of the slave woman,” i.e., “Ishmael”) were “enslaved” in the “present [*nyn*] Jerusalem,” that would imply that the “present Jerusalem” (as opposed to “the Jerusalem above [*anō*]”) was—as the result of both “Jerusalem” and “Judah” having been previously “captured” or “overtaken” by “Babylon”—understood to be functionally *equivalent* to the symbolic “Babylon.” And that finding gives additional support to the theoretical model that I have been laying out throughout this section.

The “body” or “flesh” considered as a symbol generally representing the “outer meaning” of the esoteric symbolism of the Bible; and the “spirit” considered as a symbol generally representing the “inner meaning” of that same symbolism

I believe it is likely that the authors of the New Testament intended that the symbol of the “body” (*sōma*) or “flesh” (*sarx*) be understood to signify or correspond to the “outer meanings” or “literal meanings” of Biblical symbols (and words, and parables, and figures, and allegories), while they intended that the “spirit” (*pneuma*) be understood to signify or correspond to the “inner meanings” or “figurative meanings” of those same symbols. For one thing, such an interpretation is indicated by the fact that the New Testament Greek word *pneumatikōs*, which literally means “spiritually,” can also have the senses of “allegorically, symbolically, mystically, metaphorically, figuratively,” as illustrated in Revelation 11:8. For another thing, the New Testament in several instances contrasts the “spirit” (*pneuma*) with the “letter” or “written letter” (*gramma*)—which, since the “spirit” is elsewhere in the New Testament also contrasted with the “body” or “flesh,” suggests that the “body” or “flesh” was understood to be equivalent to, or at least closely related to, the “written letter”—which I posit was understood to signify the “literal meaning,” or “outer meaning,” or “outer teaching.” For example, in 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul writes,

(God) has qualified [or enabled: *hikanoō*] us (to be) ministers of a new [*kainos*] covenant [*diathékē*]—not of written letter [*gramma*], but of spirit [*pneuma*]. For the

⁶ The Greek word used to translate *radaph* in Jeremiah 52:8 in particular is *kata-diōkō*, a derivative of *diōkō* with a meaning similar to *diōkō*, only more intensified; and Thayer’s Lexicon says that, like *diōkō*, the Greek word *kata-diōkō* is commonly used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *radaph*.

written letter [*gramma*] kills [or puts to death: *apokteinō*], but (the) spirit [*pneuma*] makes alive [*zōo-poieō*].

Compare this to what Jesus says in John 6:63:

It is the spirit [*pneuma*] that makes alive [*zōo-poieō*]; the flesh [*sarx*] is of no benefit at all. The words [or sayings: *rhéma*] that I speak to you are spirit [*pneuma*], and they are life [*zōē*].

A comparison of these two passages tends to imply that the “the written letter” (*gramma*) was understood to correspond to “the flesh” (*sarx*); it furthermore seems to imply that “the written letter” (*gramma*) was meant to be contrasted with “the words (*rhéma*) that Jesus speaks”—which would suggest a dichotomy in the New Testament authors’ minds between “the written letter” (again, probably understood to correspond to something like the “outer meaning” or “outer teaching”), and “the words that Jesus speaks”—probably understood to correspond to something like the “inner meaning” or “inner teaching.” And it seems reasonable to suppose that the *perceiving* of this “inner meaning” may have been understood to correspond to the “making” of the “new covenant.” Such an interpretation would help to explain the meaning of Galatians 4:23-24 (which I already quoted above):

[T]he (son) of the slave woman has been born in conformity with flesh [*sarx*], and the (son) of the free (woman) (has been born) through the offer [and he is also said to have been born “in conformity with the spirit [*pneuma*],” according to Galatians 4:29]—which (figures) are (serving as) allegories. For these (women) are **two covenants** [*diathéké*]....

Read in conjunction with one another, these passages suggest that the Christian apostles considered themselves to be ministers of the “covenant of Sarah,” that is, the “new covenant,” which was also the “covenant of the spirit”—in other words, I believe, the “covenant (*diathéké*) of the inner meaning.” The *other* covenant, the “old covenant,” would have been the “covenant of Hagar,” which would also have been the “covenant of the flesh,” as well as the “covenant of the written letter”—that is, what I would call the “covenant (*diathéké*) of the outer meaning.” This “covenant of the outer meaning” would correspond to what Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:7 calls “the ministry of death [*thanatos*],” presenting itself “in written letters [*gramma*] engraved [*en-typoō*] upon stones [*lithos*].”

An association between the idea of “the flesh” and that of “death” can also be found in Romans 8:5-6:

For those who are in conformity with flesh [*sarx*] direct their minds [*phroneō*] to the (things) [or the (matters)] of the flesh, but those (who are) in conformity with spirit [*pneuma*] (direct their minds to) the things of the spirit. For the mind [*phronéma*] of the flesh [*sarx*] (is) death [*thanatos*], but the mind [*phronéma*] of the spirit [*pneuma*] (is) life [*zōē*] and peace [*eiréné*].

And Romans 7:6 also suggests the same association between “the flesh” and “death”:

But now we have been discharged [or “put away,” or “eliminated”: *katargeō*] from the law, having died [*apo-thnēskō*] in [en] that by which we were being restrained [or being held; more literally, “being held down”: *kat-echō*], so that we give service [*douleuō*, a word that can also mean “to be enslaved”] in newness [or freshness: *kainotés*] of spirit [*pneuma*], and not in oldness [*palaiotés*] of written letter [*gramma*].

The hypothesis that I am offering, that the symbols of the “flesh” and the “body”—more specifically, the “outer body”—were understood to be associated with the idea of the “outer meaning,” while the symbol of the “spirit” (or “spiritual body,” or “inner body”) was associated with the idea of the “inner meaning,” might help to explain *why* Paul would have associated the “flesh” and the “body” with the idea of “death,” as well as with that of “bondage” (or “restraint,” or “captivity,” or “imprisonment,” or “slavery”). The “(outer) body” (*sōma*) and the “flesh” (*sarx*) would have been functioning ultimately as symbols of *meaninglessness*, inasmuch as they would have signified a state of affairs in which people had been *deprived of free access to*, or had been *cut off from*, either knowledge of the “inner meaning” of the outer symbolism, or the ability to put that knowledge into practice—thus creating *splits* between meanings within symbols, which would give rise to *uncertainty* about the meanings of symbols; which would in turn give rise to a sense of social and individual meaninglessness and mental instability and disorder among *all* people in society. It would also give rise to pervasive deception and self-deception in society, since, under such a state of affairs, a continual changing or shifting of the meanings that were assigned to words and other verbal symbols would not generally be seen as anything particularly shocking, objectionable, or intolerable.

As an additional illustration of the apparent association being made between the symbols of the “body” and the “flesh,” the idea of “death,” and the idea of “bondage” (or “restraint,” or “captivity,” or “slavery”)—that is, *compelled* service, as opposed to *freely given* service—consider Romans 6:6, in which Paul writes,

[O]ur old self [literally, “our old man”: *palaios hémōn anthrōpos*] was crucified [*sy-stauroō*; in other words, it was “put to death”] together with (Christ) so that the **body of sin** [*sōma tés hamartias*] might be done away with [*katargeō*], no longer to **enslave us** [or, “to make us serve”: *douleuō*] **by** [or in, or with] **sin**.

As a first comment, I suspect that the symbol of the “old self” or “old man” may have been understood to correspond to the “old covenant.” As a second comment, notice that this verse seems to be suggesting that the “old self” or “old man”—as well, perhaps, as the “old covenant”—*along with* the “body of sin,” was understood to be the *particular thing* that was “crucified” (or “put to death”; or “eliminated” or “done away”) when “Christ” or “Jesus” was crucified. In other words, it introduces the possibility that the authors of the New Testament made a conceptual distinction between two “parts” or “components” of “Jesus”: a “body of sin” and a “spirit of truth” (*pneuma tés alétheias*: see, e.g., John 15:26); and I offer the suggestion that these would have been understood to correspond to the symbols of an “outer body” and an “inner body,” respectively. As a third comment, compare the use in this passage of the Greek word *katargeō*, meaning “to do away with, to annul, to eliminate,” with Paul’s use of it in Romans 7:6, which I quoted

just above. If Paul conceived of a kind of symmetry existing between those persons who were “in Christ,” on the one hand, and “the law” or the “body of sin,” on the other—so that as either “the law” or “body of sin” was “done away with” or “put to death” (*katargeō*), so too would the person who was “in Christ” have been “done away with” or “put to death” (*katargeō*) **with respect to** “the law” or the “body of sin”—then that would suggest that Paul understood some *aspect* of each person who was “in Christ” to be equivalent to “the law” (in the more “exterior” sense of the term “the law”), as well as to the “body of sin.” In other words, each person who was “in Christ” would have had his own individual symbolic “body of sin.” And I think the symbolic figure of “Christ” may have functioned as a conceptual *composite* of all of these individual Christians—**including** their individual symbolic “bodies of sin.”

Thus, according to the theory I am offering, the symbolic “body of sin” would not have been understood to belong solely to those who were “in Christ”: ***it would have been understood to belong also to the figure of Christ himself.*** Just as each Christian was understood to have two conceptually distinguishable “parts,” so too would the figure of Jesus been understood to have two conceptually distinguishable “parts.” And so not all of “Jesus” would have been considered by the authors of the New Testament to have been “put to death” (in the sense of “permanently destroyed”) with his Crucifixion: only Jesus’s “outer body” would have been “put to death”; and I think this “outer body” would have been understood to correspond to the ideas of the “old man,” the “old covenant,” the “outer law,” the “outer meaning,” the “outer man,” and the “body of sin.” Moreover, if one were to conceptually oppose a “body of sin” to a “spirit of truth,” the possibility is raised that the “body of sin” might also have been conceived of as a ***body of lies***, which would have been envisioned as holding the “spirit of truth” as a kind of “captive” within itself. I believe the “Crucifixion” may have been understood to symbolize ***the effecting of a separation*** between the “body of lies” and the “spirit of truth”; and, in so doing, it would also have been deemed to achieve a kind of “liberation” of the “spirit of truth” that had up until then been “held prisoner,” or “enslaved”—or “hidden,” or “veiled”—within or beneath the “body of lies.”

Therefore, there is reason to believe that the “body of sin” or “body of lies” may have been understood to be symbolically represented by the same “(outer) body of Jesus” that was described as having been “crucified” or “pierced.” Such a theory would help to explain Gospel passages in which it is insisted that it was *necessary* that the Crucifixion take place (see, e.g., Luke 24:25-26): necessary, that is, that Jesus “put off” the “old body”—the “body of lies”—so that he might “put on” a new, *spiritual body*; and in doing this he would have been serving as the archetype for all members of the Christian churches, who, according to many passages in the New Testament epistles, were expected to do the same.

This interpretation also seems to receive at least some support from Revelation 22:6, which describes “the Lord” as **“the God of the spirits [pneumatōn, a plural form of *pneuma*] of the prophets.”** It may be significant that in this verse “the Lord” is being described only as the God of the “spirits” of the prophets—and not of the “bodies” or “souls” of the prophets (and by “the prophets,” I think what the author really meant was “the prophetic writings”). Similarly, Revelation 19:10 says that **“the testimony [martyria] of Jesus is the spirit [pneuma] of prophecy.”** The implication seems to be that the “body” of prophecy did not represent the “testimony of Jesus,” but rather some other

kind of meaning—one, I suggest, that was not deemed to be *essential*, and also one that was not deemed to be “clear” or “pure” (attributes which the Bible associates with “the Spirit”).

Furthermore, this theory would also suggest that the figure of “Jesus” may have been understood to symbolize *both* covenants in himself, and that the symbolic “Crucifixion” was understood to signify a “putting off” or “shedding” of the “old covenant” so that the “new covenant” could be “revealed.” Moreover, this would indicate that Paul believed that there was an intrinsic connection between this “putting off” of the “old covenant” and the “putting off” of a person’s “old self”—which, based on my reading of Romans 7:15-25, seems to have been associated in his mind with lies and self-deception.

As another example of the association between the symbols of “the body,” “death,” and “bondage,” in Romans 7:22-24 Paul writes,

For I feel full satisfaction in the law [*nomos*] of God, according to the inner man [*esō anthrōpos*]. But I perceive another law [*nomos*] in my members, warring against the law [*nomos*] of my mind [*nous*] and making me captive to the law [*nomos*] of sin [*hamartia*] that is in my members. A suffering man [*anthrōpos*] I am. Who will rescue me from [or “pull me out of,” or “snatch me out of,” or “pluck me out of,” or “deliver me from”: *rhyomai*] this body of death [or “the body of this death”]?

This passage suggests that the reason *why* Paul was “a suffering man” was that a *split* existed within him between his “inner man” and some other, “outer man”—both of these being contained within a *single* “man” (*anthrōpos*), Paul—so that he, Paul, was “conflicted” or “torn between” the two. His “outer man” was apparently thought to correspond to the notion of a “body of death”; and the “body of death” seems to have been visualized as a kind of “container” or “prison” or “cage” that was “holding in” the “inner man,” and was preventing it from expressing itself in *outer action*, and in *open and honest speech*: thus preventing the “law of Paul’s mind” (i.e., the “law of his inner self”) from becoming, so to speak, the “law of his body” (i.e., the “law of his outer self”). And I postulate that the authors of the New Testament understood this *same* notion of “two men contained within one man” to have been symbolized by the figure of “Jesus” as we find him described in the Gospels *prior to* the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Moreover, I believe that this sense of self-alienation, of an “inner man” being *opposed to* an “outer man,” can ultimately be traced to human society’s collective decision to allow splits to be made between “inner meanings” and “outer meanings” in the words and other verbal symbols it uses. And when Paul refers to “sin,” especially in the context of the quoted passage (Romans 7:22-24), I believe that what was foremost in his mind was *pervasive and systematic deception and self-deception*, since this would best explain why Paul did not feel that he was in control of his own decisions and actions. (This would be so *whether or not* that is how Paul himself would have chosen to explain his writings, since, in any event, I think one might regard an emphasis on this particular conception of “sin” as *implicit* in the mental scheme he was presenting to the reader.) If one were to adopt this interpretation, the “body of sin” of which he speaks might be thought of as representing the *system* of symbols, and interpretations of those symbols, that would hold together and gives permanence to tendencies of deception and self-deception in society. The “body of sin” would, again, thus have also been a “body of

lies”—and this symbol would have been serving in part (albeit somewhat unconsciously, perhaps) as a symbol of the esotericist religious system considered as a general phenomenon and societal arrangement.

As I suggested above, I think it would make sense to think of the “body”—whether a “body of sin” or a “body of lies”—as an “*outer* body.” According to the hypothesis I am offering, the “inner body” would have been the “body” that was animated by the Holy Spirit, which would have been understood to be a spirit of *unity*. Once it had come into manifestation, this “inner body” would have been equivalent to the resurrected “body of life” or “spiritual body” or “life-giving spirit.” A person’s “inner body” would have been “built up” to the extent that the person was animated by the Holy Spirit. The “outer body,” on the other hand, would have been the “body” animated by a spirit of *discord*; and it would have been this discord, or disharmony, or internal hostility that *made* it a “body of death.” Alternatively, one might think of the “inner body”/“outer body” dichotomy in the following way: it would have been the fact that a “body” was joined to the “Holy Spirit”—i.e., a spirit of *unity*—that *made* this particular “body” an “inner body” or a “spiritual body”; and it would have been the fact that this *same* “body” was joined to a “spirit of discord” or an “unclean spirit” that *made* it an “outer body.” An “inner body” or “spiritual body” would have been intrinsically a *unified* body; and an “outer body” or “fleshy body” would have been intrinsically a *divided* body. Furthermore, I believe that this distinction made between an “outer body” and an “inner body” would probably have been understood to correspond to the intended significance of the distinction that the New Testament authors made between the symbol of “outer garments” and that of an “inner garment” (for example in John 19:23), which appear to have been likewise distinguished from each other according to whether the garment was “united” or “divided.”

When I refer to the “discord” (along with words such as “disharmony,” “hostility,” “division,” or “alienation”) that I think may have been understood to characterize the “outer body,” I am referring to discord both within oneself and with respect to other individuals. My sense is that the authors of the New Testament believed (consciously or unconsciously) that, whether inner division was found within a single person, or within a single people, or within the entire human species, these were mere variations on a single basic principle. Thus, from one point of view, *self-alienation* may have been seen as the ultimate source of hostility both between individuals and between peoples: the source, that is, of mutual hostility among “the nations.” At the same time, the internal division created *in society* by esotericist institutions—between some social group of “initiated” or “sacred” persons, and some other social group of “profane,” or “vulgar,” or “unclean” persons, with the result that both social classes would always be at odds with each other, and would thus need to feel constantly wary of one another—would *inevitably* be reflected, to a greater or less extent, in the mind of every individual *person* living in such a society; so that, from another point of view, a certain kind of *class division within society* may have been seen to be the ultimate source of self-alienation and loss of individual mental integration (and moral integrity). That is because the fundamental reason for both the societal discord and the individual psychic division is the *deception* that is necessarily involved in the esotericist social arrangement, which normalizes deception in society and helps to desensitize people to its presence—*especially* among the society’s elites, who serve as a society’s “role models”—so that it ends up spreading

everywhere. For that reason, it becomes possible to see that when Paul extols the “unity” or “oneness” of the Spirit and of God (see, e.g., Ephesians 4:3), as well as when he extols the “peace [or wholeness: *eiréné*] of God” (Philippians 4:7), he is really also implicitly condemning—consciously or unconsciously—the use of esotericist deception (along with deception of any other kind). Thus, for either Christians or the figure of “Christ” to “put off” or “lay aside” the “outer body” may have been understood to represent the achieving of the “putting off” or “laying aside” of “the spirit of discord”—which, from the perspective of the single individual, would also be to do away with self-alienation and self-deception. At the same time, from the perspective of society, it would be to put aside *social* alienation and *social* deception—especially including the esotericist deception promoted by traditional forms of religion.

The possible symbolic significance of “blood” and “water” in the New Testament

Both the symbols of “blood” and “water” appear to play important roles in the symbolic scheme presented by the authors of the New Testament. There is some scriptural support for the notion that there was understood to be an association between the symbol of “flesh” or “(outer) body,” and that of “blood.” This is indicated partly by the fact that “flesh and blood” (*sarx kai haima*) are in several instances in the New Testament spoken of as a coupled pair (for example, in Matthew 16:17). Assuming this association is correct, both “flesh” and “blood” appear to have in turn been associated with *psyché* (meaning “soul,” or a person’s individual “life” or “life-force” in his body), as well as with the idea of “man” (or “human things,” or “human affairs”), along with the idea of “earth” (or “earthly things”). And all of these ideas were generally contrasted with *pneuma* (meaning “spirit”), which was associated with the ideas of “God,” “the divine,” and “heaven.” Thus, “draining” a “body” of its “soul” (*psyché*), which might be thought of as its symbolic “blood,” and then replacing it with “spirit” (*pneuma*), symbolized by “water” (more specifically, “living water,” or “life-giving water”)—which would function as the body’s “new blood,” so to speak—would be what would transform an “outer body” into an “inner body” or “spiritual body.”

The idea of the “outer body” may have been understood by the authors of the New Testament to involve the idea of “confusion” or “mixture”—related to the “Babel”/“Babylon” symbolism—since I suspect that the “redness” of the “blood” found in the “outer body” may have been conceptualized, for esotericist purposes, as the result of symbolic “water” (which would in this case signify “spirit”) having been “mixed” with symbolic “red earth.” (I make that suggestion partly because of certain apparent etymological relations in the Hebrew language: the Hebrew word for “red” is *adom*, while the Hebrew word for “blood” is *dam*, and the Hebrew word for “earth” or “ground” is *adamah*.) The “new blood” (i.e., “spirit” or “living water”) of the “inner body” or “spiritual body” might then have been thought to involve the ideas of “purity,” “unity,” or “harmony.” So it seems possible that it was the “Holy Spirit” that was understood to have come to “replace” the symbolic “blood” that had been “drained” or “poured out” (Greek: *ek-cheō*) from the “outer body” of Jesus—which would have been meant to represent *all* symbolic “outer bodies,” of *all* persons. And the “body of Christ,” the one composed of all Christians (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:17), may have been understood to correspond to a kind of large-scale “inner body” that the apostles were trying to build up

“inside of Babylon,” one which would have been understood to be “filled” with the Holy Spirit, or “living water,” and so would be a “body” that was free of “confusion,” “division,” and “discord.” If this hypothesis is correct, it might explain why John 19:34 says that both “blood” and “water” came out of Jesus’s body after it was pierced with a spear while on the Cross: It may have been meant as a clue to the reader that “Jesus” (who would also have corresponded to “Jerusalem” in general) was understood to contain *two* bodies in himself, and when the outer body (or “Babylon,” or the “present Jerusalem”) was “pierced,” the “inner body” (or the “new Jerusalem”) would have been “pierced” at the same time; the first, “outer” body would pour out “(red) blood,” and the second, “inner” body would pour out “water”—like a “fountain” (cf. Revelation 21:6 and 22:1).

Especially if the symbols of the “outer body” and its “old blood” (or “red blood”)—as opposed to “new blood,” or “living water,” or “Holy Spirit”—were understood to involve the ideas of “confusion” or “mixture,” I suspect that the “mixing” (or “confusing,” or “commingling,” or “confounding,” or “pouring together”: Hebrew *balal*; LXX Greek *syg-cheō*) of language associated with the symbol of “Babel” or “Babylon” was understood to be more or less conceptually equivalent to the notion of “uncleanliness of spirit” or “impurity of spirit”; and I think that the notion of a “purified language” that is found in Zephaniah 3:9 may have been understood to be closely related to the notion of “purity of spirit.” In fact, Zephaniah 3:9, which speaks of a “purified [or *clarified*, or cleansed, or purged: *barar*] language [*saphah*],” may have been intended to be directly contrasted with Genesis 11:7, which speaks of a “confusing (or mixing: *balal*) of language [*saphah*]” in connection with the story of the building of the “Tower of Babel.” I think it may have been “purity of language” that was understood to make it possible to overcome some prior division into separate “inner” and “outer” types of meaning (followed inevitably by the subsequent and practically immediate “mixing” or “confusing” of those multiple types of meaning). The authors of the New Testament may have—consciously or unconsciously—deemed the overcoming of that division to be what would make it possible for a unified “inner body” or “spiritual body” to be manifested in outer action. That is because, once again, there is reason to think that a resurrected “spiritual body” or “inner body” was understood to be a body in which outer meanings (i.e., “the body,” or “the outer body,” or “the flesh”) and inner meanings (i.e., “the spirit”) were no longer cloven in two. But the “inner body” cannot be manifested in outer action so long as it must still *compete* with the “outer body” for its existence, since this competition promotes the internal *division* that is intrinsically hostile to the very existence of an “inner body,” which appears to be characterized and defined by its unity (or, at least, its *yearning* for unity). Presumably the “inner body” could only ever be manifested once the “outer body”—considered as something *separate from* the “inner body”—had been *fully* displaced, or done away, or eliminated, or neutralized.

When I propose that the “Holy Spirit” (or “living water”) may have been understood to “replace” or “supersede” the symbolic “(red) blood” that had been “drained” or “poured out” (Greek: *ek-cheō*) from the “outer body” of Jesus, this is not to suggest that the “blood” of Jesus’s “outer body” would have been seen as “defective” per se, any more than the *psyché* or “soul” was seen as “defective” per se. But I do think that the “old blood” (or “red blood”) circulating through Jesus’s “outer body” would probably have been seen as in some way *inferior to* the “new blood” (i.e., “living water”)

circulating through Jesus’s “inner body.” It is true that the “blood” (*haima*) that had been “shed” or “poured out” by Jesus is described in 1 Peter 1:19 as “precious” (or “costly”: *timios*). But, at the same time, the “merchants” and “traders” of Babylon are also described in Revelation 18:19 as having been made rich by Babylon’s “preciousness” (or “costliness,” or “wealth”: *timiotés*). So 1 Peter 1:19 should not necessarily be read to imply that the New Testament authors believed that the “blood” that “Jesus” had “shed” or “poured out” was not meant to be *replaced by*, or be *transformed into*, something else, and something considered better. In fact, 1 Peter 1:18-19 says,

[Y]ou were ransomed [or redeemed: *lytroō*] from your pointless way of life handed down from (your) (fore)fathers [*patro-paradotos*, derived from *para-didōmi*, which can mean “to hand down, to hand over, to deliver over, to transmit,” as well as “to betray”], not by **corruptible silver or gold, but by the precious** [or costly: *timios*] **blood of Christ, as (that) of an unblemished** [or blameless, or faultless, or unimpaired, or perfect: *amōmos*] **and spotless** [or faultless, or undefiled, or unsullied, or irreproachable: *aspilos*; in other words, *uncorrupted*] **lamb.**

If the symbolic “blood” (along with the “flesh,” presumably) was serving as the “ransom” in an exchange, then that means it had to have been “given up,” not “retained.” Furthermore, the comparison made between “silver or gold” and the “costly blood of Christ” suggests that Jesus’s “blood” was indeed being compared to the “wealth” (or “costliness,” or “preciousness,” or “magnificence,” or “opulence”: *timiotés*) of Babylon/Babel, with the difference between them perhaps having been that Jesus’s “wealth” was understood to be some sort of uncorrupted or pure “version” of the corresponding “wealth” of Babylon. So, according to what I think may have been the authors’ conception, the “wealth” of Jesus’s “blood” (and “flesh”) would not have *permanently replaced* the “wealth” of Babylon; rather, I think the “wealth” of Jesus’s “blood” (and “flesh”) would have been made to serve as a kind of *temporary substitute* for the “wealth” of Babylon, thereby enabling *both of them* to be “done away with,” so that *both of them* could then be replaced by *something else*: something which was not “costly” (*regardless* of whether or not it was “corrupt” or “corruptible”), and which would thenceforth be given “freely,” or “without payment,” or “as a gift” (Greek *dōrean*)—in exactly the same way that the “living water” is said in Revelation 21:6 to be given out in the “new Jerusalem.” And in Revelation 22:1 this “living water” or “water of life” is said to “go forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb,” which suggests that in the “new Jerusalem” it would no longer be “blood”—or, at least, not the “old” or “red” or “earthy” kind of “blood”—that would thenceforth flow out of the symbolic sacrificial “lamb.” Furthermore, I think that what was *being* redeemed or ransomed in the exchange, according to this symbolic scheme, was “Babylon” itself—or, to be more precise, “the harlot of Babylon,” signifying the figure of “Eve” or the archetypal “Woman” in her then-current state. Or, to state it somewhat differently, the figure of “Hagar” was being transformed into the figure of “Sarah,” thus reflecting a transformation of the archetypal “Woman” from a state of “slavery” into one of “freedom.” Once this process of “ransoming” or “redeeming” was complete, the “harlot” would be suitable to become the “bride” of the “lamb,” both now sharing in the same measure of “innocence” and “purity” and “incorruption.”

I believe the two types of “wealth” to which I am referring would have been understood to correspond generally to two different types of *interpretive approaches* to the esoteric symbolism of the Bible (just as “silver” and “gold” would probably each have been understood to signify types of interpretive approaches in their own right). The “blood” of Jesus would thus have been understood to represent a kind of “means of exchange”; and the “pouring out” of the “blood” (i.e., the symbolic “Crucifixion”) would have been understood to represent a *final “trade”*—that is, a *final “translation” of the symbolism*—by means of which all of the “exchanging” and “trading” and “substituting” of meanings that had long been associated with the symbol of “Babylon” or “Babel” would be brought to an end.

This theory receives additional support from several passages in which Paul refers to the “reconciling” that Christ does. In Colossians 1:19-22 he writes,

For it pleased (God) to have all the fullness [*plērōma*] dwell [*kat-oikeō*] in (Christ), and through him to reconcile [or change, or change back: *apo-katallassō*] all things [*panta*] to [or into: *eis*] himself, having made peace [*eiréno-poieō*] through the blood [*haima*] of his Cross—through him—both the (things) upon earth and the (things) in the heavens. And you, who were at one time alienated [*ap-allotrioō*] and hostile [or hateful: *echthros*] in mind [*dianoia*], (and) evil in deed, he has now reconciled [or changed, or changed back: *apo-katallassō*] in the body [*sōma*] of his flesh [*sarx*] [or, “in his body of flesh”], through the death [*thanatos*], to present you [or, “to place (you) beside (him)”]: *par-istēmi*] holy and unblemished [or blameless, or faultless, or unimpaired, or perfect: *amōmos*] and above reproach [*anegklétos*] before him....

And in Ephesians 2:14-16 Paul writes,

For (Christ) himself is our peace [or harmony, or concord, or wholeness: *eiréné*], having made [*poieō*] both [*amphoterōi*] (into) one, and having pulled apart [or broken down, or torn down: *lyō*] the dividing wall [*meso-toichon*, derived from *toichos*, which means “wall” and is an alternate form of *teichos*] of the barrier [or hedge, or fence: *phragmos*], the hostility [or enmity, or hatred: *echthra*] in his [!] flesh [*en té sarki autou*], having done away with [*katargeō*] the law of commandments [*entolé*] in ordinances [or decrees: *dogma*], so that he might in himself transform [or fashion, or build, or form: *ktizō*] the two [*dyo*] into one new [*kainos*] man [or person: *anthrōpos*], making [*poieō*] peace [or harmony, or concord, or wholeness: *eiréné*], and might reconcile [or change, or change back: *apo-katallassō*] both [*amphoterōi*] to God in one body [*sōma*], through the Cross, having put to death [or killed, or slain: *apokteinō*] the hostility [or enmity, or hatred: *echthra*] in it [the word “it” apparently referring to “the body,” “the flesh,” and “the man” all at once].

It is interesting that the word *apo-katallassō*, meaning “to reconcile” or “to change (back),” is used in both of these passages, and in both cases is associated with the Crucifixion—that is, with the “pulling apart” of the “flesh,” and with the “death” of the “body of flesh”; and, it is thus also implied, with the “pouring out” of the “blood”—with the result that some state of “unity” would thereby ultimately be achieved. The word *katallassō*, from which *apo-katallassō* is derived, can, like *apo-katallassō*, similarly mean

“to reconcile” (i.e., “to change (one’s attitude toward a person)”); it can also mean “to atone.” But in addition to these meanings, *katallassō* can also have the meaning of “to exchange” or “to change” (especially as in “money changing”), or “to buy and sell.” This suggests that the “reconciliation” or “atonement” achieved by the symbolic “Crucifixion” may actually have been understood to be achieved by means of the executing of some great “exchange of currencies” or “changing of monies”—which I think may have been understood to symbolize some great “translation” (or “changing of perceived meanings,” or “re-interpretation”) of the symbolism.

The possible symbolic significance of “oldness” in the New Testament; and the possible significance of symbolism involving the archetypal figures of the “elder brother/elder son” and “younger brother/younger son”

In Romans 7:6 (which I also quote above), the idea of “newness” is found associated with the idea of “the spirit,” as well as with those of “life” and “freedom” (or “freely given service”), while the idea of “oldness” or the state of “being an elder,” or “seniority,” is associated with “the body,” “death,” and “bondage” (or “slavery,” or “restraint”):

But now we have been discharged [or “put away”: *katargeō*] **from the law, having died** [*apothnēskō*] **in** [*en*] **that (by) which we were being restrained** [or “being held,” or “being held back,” or “being held down”: *kat-echō*], **so that we give service** [*douleuō*] **in newness** [or freshness: *kainotés*] **of spirit** [*pneuma*], **and not in oldness** [*palaiotés*] **of written letter** [*gramma*].

The association of the idea of “oldness” specifically with the idea of “being restrained” brings to mind the phrase “elder in chains,” which is one possible translation of the phrase *presbeuō en halysei* as an alternative to “ambassador in chains” in Ephesians 6:20, one of the verses already quoted above. And here in Romans 7:6, both of these ideas are also in turn found associated with the idea of the “written letter” (i.e., “the outer law”): a term that can, I believe, be thought of as an alternate name for the idea of the “outer meaning.”

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-20, a similar association can be found between the idea of “oldness” and that of “the flesh”; and “the flesh,” for reasons given above, appears in general to correspond to the idea of the “written letter” or “the law,” as well as to that of “captivity” or “restraint.” In 2 Corinthians 5:16-20 Paul writes,

Even if [or even though: *ei kai*] **we came to know** [or we learned, or we became acquainted with: *ginōskō*] **Christ according to flesh** [*sarx*], **now we know** [*ginōskō*] **him (in this way) no longer, so that if anyone (is) in** [*en*] **Christ, (he is) a new** [*kainé*, a form of *kainos*] **creation** [*ktisis*]. **The old (things)** [or former (things), or first (things): *archaia*, related to the word *arché*, meaning “beginning, origin, first (part or element), leading (part or element)”) **have passed away** [*par-erchomai*]; **behold, (the) new (things)** [*kaina*, a form of *kainos*] **have come into being** [*gegonan*, a form of *ginomai*]. **And all (things)** [*panta*] **(are) from God, he who changed** [*kat-allassō*] **us to (become more like) himself** [or, “who reconciled us to himself”] **through Christ,**

and who gave to us the ministration of [or “office of,” in the sense of “having responsibility for”] **change** [or reconciliation: *katallagé*, derived from *kat-allassō*]—**just as** [or “so that”] **God has been, in Christ, changing** [*kat-allassō*] **(the) world** [*kosmos*] **to (become more like) himself** [or “has been, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”], **not including in (people’s) accounts** [or, “not imputing to them”]: *logizomai*, related to the word *logos*, which can mean “account”] **their stumblings** [or fallings: *para-ptōma*], **and having placed** [or deposited: *tithēmi*] **in us the account** [or message, or discourse, or word: *logos*] **of change** [or reconciliation: *katallagé*]. **Therefore** [*oun*], **we are ambassadors** [or “elders”; or, both “elders” and “ambassadors” at once: *presbeuō*] **on behalf of** [or for the sake of: *hyper*] **Christ, as if God is calling for** [or summoning, or exhorting: *para-kaleō*] **(you) through us. We beseech you on behalf of** [or for the sake of: *hyper*] **Christ: Be reconciled to God** [or, “Be changed to (become more like) God”: *kat-allassō*].

As an initial matter, notice that in this passage “knowing Christ according to flesh” is seemingly being associated with “the old things [*archaia*],” while “being in Christ” is being equated with “being a new creation,” and with the “coming into being of new things [*kaina*].” In other words, there is an *opposition* being set up between “knowing Christ according to flesh” and “being in Christ”; and those who only know Christ “according to flesh”—which I believe means “according to the *outer* interpretation of the esoteric symbolism”—are not yet considered to “be *in Christ*.” Furthermore, the theme of “old things (*archaia*) having passed away (*par-erchomai*)” and of “new things (*kaina*) having come into being (*gegonan*, a form of *ginomai*)” is strongly reminiscent of Revelation 21:1-7, which describes the “passing away” (*ap-erchomai*) of “(the) first heaven and the first earth,” and the creation or coming into being of “**a new** [*kainos*] **heaven and a new** [*kainos*] **earth**”; and in this passage Jesus also says, “**I make all (things)** [*panta*] **new** [*kaina*],” as well as announcing—presumably in reference to these “new things”—that “**they have come into being** [or, that ‘they have been born’: *gegonan*, a form of *ginomai*].” But notice that this parallel between the two passages tends to imply that the “Second Coming” was considered to have *already* occurred for those individuals who were “in Christ.” So in those places in the New Testament epistles where the “coming of the Lord” is spoken of as an event that would occur in the future, this may have been understood to refer to that time when the same “inner meanings” that had *already* been (to some extent) discerned by those who were “in Christ” would be publicly disclosed (or otherwise discovered or known) on a more widespread basis. And perhaps it was believed that only with the occurrence of such a great “revealing” could the transforming or changing or reconciling of *everyone*—the whole “world” (*kosmos*), even those who were already “in Christ”—become *completed*. If so, then that might be partly because even if the “inner meanings” had already been “discerned” by those who were “in Christ” to some greater extent than those who were not yet “in Christ,” those “inner meanings” would still not necessarily have been discerned at a fully *conscious* level of awareness; it may be that even those who were “in Christ” still required that the “inner meanings” be made *more* conscious to them before those meanings could be considered to have been fully “revealed” or “disclosed.” Or—closely related to this idea—perhaps it was the inability of the persons who were already “in Christ” to *articulate* their understandings of the “inner meanings” in more conscious (and thus, *less misleading*)

terms to others that was continuing to prevent a more widespread “revealing” from occurring, thereby preventing the rest of the “world” from being similarly “reconciled”; and the resulting failure of the others to be “reconciled” would in turn have had a negative impact on the Christians’ *own* ability to fully “uncover” those “inner meanings,” since both those who were “in Christ” and those who were not “in Christ” were inhabitants of the same society, and so could not help but influence each other’s thinking (or lack of thinking).

The passage I just quoted, 2 Corinthians 5:16-20, includes two references to “oldness”: first, the use of the word *archaia*, meaning “old (things)”; and second, the use of the word *presbeuō*, meaning “to be older,” “to be senior,” or “to be prior in age,” or, alternatively (but still related to the other meanings), “to be an ambassador.” As I already pointed out, the “old (things)” (*archaia*) are apparently being associated with the symbol of the “flesh,” which, by looking at other New Testament passages, can in turn be associated with the notion of “restraint” or “captivity.” With regard to the word *presbeuō*, in this passage, unlike in the case of the phrase *presbeuō en halysei* used in Ephesians 6:20, there is no overt connection between the use of the word *presbeuō* and the idea of “restraint.” That might indicate that Paul intended for this particular use of the word to be understood to have a primary sense of “to be an ambassador”; but even if so, it would not necessarily exclude the possibility that he intended for it to have both senses at the same time. I think it is conceivable that, because of their “seniority” or their status as “elders” (in terms of symbolic “age” and amount of learning, not literal age) with respect to the ordinary convert to Christianity, Paul saw himself and the other apostles—or, perhaps, to be more precise, the “Christ within them” or the “*logos* within them” mentioned in the passage—as *intermediaries* (and thus also “ambassadors” or “delegates”) between the “old” and the “new”: intermediaries, that is, between the cryptic outer meanings and the “true” or “intended” inner meanings of the scriptures that would have been deemed to be “revealed” in so far as they had “been made new” or had “become new.” If so, the understanding of the New Testament authors and other high-level Christians may have been that while the apostles would perhaps speak *less* cryptically and would try to spread their “inner message” to a wider audience than what would have been considered permissible under the “old order,” they would still speak *more* cryptically than what people in the future would be expected to do under some “new order,” once—as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13:8 and 13:2—“prophecies” (*prophēteia*), and “tongues” (*glōssa*), and “(occult) knowledge” (*gnōsis*), and (so it is implied) “mysteries” (*mysterion*), had all been “done away with” (or “exhausted,” or “worked out,” or “rendered useless”: *kat-argeō*) and “brought to an end” (*pauō*).

However, the sense of “outerness” that I believe may have been attached to the idea of “oldness” would also have an even more important potential significance. The Bible says that the Jewish and Christian God is “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (see, for example, Exodus 3:6). Abraham is said in Genesis 16:15 and Genesis 21:3 to have been the father of Ishmael and Isaac, and Isaac is said in Genesis 25:19-26 to have been the father of the “twins” Esau and Jacob. In regard to both of these generations, I think that the authors of the New Testament may have deemed the “elder son” (namely, Ishmael and Esau) to symbolize the “outer meaning” of the esoteric symbolism, while deeming the “younger son” (namely, Isaac and Jacob) to symbolize the “inner meaning” of that same esoteric symbolism (or, to be more precise, *an understanding* of the “inner

meaning”). I make this suggestion partly because one comes to an understanding of the “outer” or “exoteric” meaning of the text *before* one comes to an understanding of its “inner” or “esoteric” meaning—which would make the *first* of the two interpretations the “elder” or “senior” interpretation. Such an hypothesis is also supported by the fact that both Isaac and Jacob are described as having been favored over their older brothers Ishmael and Esau (see Genesis 21:9-12, 25:23, and 27:37), which would be consistent with assuming the greater “value” (or “worth,” or “preciousness,” or “dignity”: Greek *timé*) of the inner meaning. The same split between the literal and “spiritual” interpretations might also be what was meant to be symbolized by references to “two brothers” or “twins” found in the Gospels (see, for example, Matthew 4:18, 4:21, and 20:24). It might also be what is being referred to in verses such as Luke 17:34-35, in which Jesus, speaking of the “end times,” says,

I say to you, in that night [nyx] there will be two (persons) [or two (men): dyo] on one bed [kliné]; one will be received [or taken, or accepted; or, more figuratively, “learned”: para-lambanō] and the other will be let go [or given up, or yielded up: aphíemi]. There will be two (women) [dyo] grinding meal [aléthō] at the same (place together); one will be received [or taken, or accepted, or learned: para-lambanō], and the other will be let go [or given up, or yielded up: aphíemi].

The particular words used by the author, *para-lambanō* (meaning “to take,” “to receive,” “to accept,” or, more figuratively, “to learn”), and *aphíemi* (meaning “to let go,” “to give up,” or “to yield up”), do indeed lend themselves to a reading of the parable in such a way that the first figurative “person” in each of the two pairs serves as a symbol for the “inner meaning” (or “inner body”), while the second figurative “person” serves as a symbol for the “outer meaning” (or “outer body”). The “inner meaning” (or “inner body”) would be “received” (or “taken,” or “accepted,” or “learned”), while the “outer meaning” (or “outer body”) would be “let go” (or “given up,” or “yielded up”). According to this reading, one *actual* (and not figurative) person could be thought of as doing *both* the “receiving” *and* the “letting go” of these two figurative “persons”: In other words, the *actual* person would be involved in a process of *separating* or *winnowing* of two potentially *distinct* elements, so that one of them could be kept and the other could be thrown away.

Regarding the distinction between the figures of “Esau” and “Jacob,” consider the description of the birth of Esau in Genesis 25:25:

The first [or leader: rishon, derived from rosh, meaning “chief, head, top”; LXX: prōto-tokos, meaning “first-born”] came forth wholly [kol; LXX: holos] red [or, possibly, “earthy”: admoni; LXX: pyrrakés, literally meaning “fiery-red”], like an outer garment [or cloak, or coat: addereth; LXX: dora, meaning “a skin” or “a hide”] of hair [or roughness, or bristles, or fur: sear; LXX: dasys], and they called his name Esau [perhaps derived from the Hebrew word asah, which in this case would probably have been meant to have its more original sense of “to touch” or “to handle (an object or tool),” but which more generally means “to make, to do”].

This verse should be compared to Zechariah 13:4, which I already quoted above: “**And it will come to pass in that day (that) every one of the prophets will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on an outer garment [addereth; LXX: derris, meaning “a skin”] of hair [sear; LXX: trichinos] in order to deceive.**” It seems reasonable to infer based on a comparison of these two verses that *every* prophet was understood to be operating beneath the guise of an outer “covering”—equivalent to an “outer meaning,” or “literal meaning,” or “fleshly meaning,” or “carnal meaning,” or “natural meaning”—which, I believe, was figuratively represented by “Esau.” Moreover, it would have been *understood* that this outer meaning would be inherently misleading and deceptive in the way it functioned. In other words, the figure of speech of “wearing the hairy outer garment” that is used in Zechariah 13:4 seems to be referring to the idea of “impersonating Esau” by means of wearing a mask or disguise—that is, *pretending* to believe in the truth of the literal meaning while in the presence of the “multitude,” while *covertly* reading the text in a highly metaphorical way, so that the words being used, and the characters and situations being described, secretly become converted into esoteric religious symbols and allegories whose “true” meanings are known only to “the initiated.” So it is not likely to be a coincidence that Genesis 27:1-38 describes an episode in which Jacob *impersonates Esau* in order to “take his blessing from him”; nor is it likely to be a coincidence that the figure of Jacob is repeatedly described or portrayed as practicing “deceit” or “trickery” or “treachery” (Hebrew *ramah* or *mirmah*; see, e.g., Genesis 27:35 and 29:25).

If the archetypal “elder son” (represented by Ishmael and Esau) was indeed meant to symbolize the “outer meaning” of the Biblical symbolism, while the archetypal “younger son” (represented by Isaac and Jacob) was meant to symbolize the “inner meaning” of that same symbolism, then this would provide an additional reason why it would not be unreasonable to think that Paul intended that the phrase *presbeuō en halysei* in Ephesians 6:20, usually translated as “I am an ambassador in chains,” be translated as “I am an elder in chains”—or, at least, to think that both translations should be considered equally valid. Paul might, in essence, have been telling his audience that he was still wearing the “outer garment of hair [or roughness]” of a prophet, which would thus have given him the *appearance* of being an “elder” along the lines of “Esau.” And Paul’s feeling required to *present himself* under the guise of “Esau” or “Edom,” while at the same time thinking of himself as *actually* serving in the role of “Jacob” or “Israel” beneath that “outer cover,” would have resulted in his regarding himself as having been metaphorically “bound” or “put in chains”—that is, *restricted* in terms of what he would have felt permitted to say openly.

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus understood as symbolically or allegorically prefiguring future events, rather than as describing past historical events

It is ordinarily assumed that the description of the episode of Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection given in the Gospels was meant to record past historical events. I believe, however, that it was intended by the authors of the New Testament to symbolically or allegorically *prefigure* future events. According to such a reading of the New Testament, what might be called the “First Coming” would correspond to the *initial public presentation* of the Gospel narrative, understood in more or less literal terms. If the

Gospel narrative was in fact intended to prefigure future events under the guise of describing past events, then that would mean that this “First Coming” would also refer to the initial dissemination, in heavily symbolic or allegorical terms, of the broad outlines of an (at least partly) humanly-designed and humanly-executed conspiracy. And what is generally called the “Second Coming”—or, as it is stated more literally in the Bible, “the coming (*erchomai*) of the Lord,” or “the becoming present (or coming near: *parousia*) of the Lord,” or “the day (*hémera*) of the Lord,” or “the uncovering (*apokalypsis*) of the Lord”—would refer to the final *realization*, or *bringing to fulfillment*, of the aims of this conspiracy (to whatever extent one chooses to regard this “conspiracy” as having been conscious or non-conscious, or human or non-human in nature); and this “fulfillment” would have in some way involved the “revealing” (or “uncovering”: Greek *apo-kalyptō*) of previously hidden *inner meanings* that the authors of the New Testament intended would be given to their own writings, and inner meanings that those authors had themselves discerned in the text of the Old Testament. (It is conceivable that a “revealing” of this kind would have been *in addition to* the revealing of some sort of previously hidden knowledge that had not been presented, even allegorically, in the Bible itself—but this is pure conjecture on my part.) Such a conspiracy might be generally described as one that involved trying to *use* esotericism to *destroy* esotericism. In so far as the conspiracy was consciously designed by human beings—as I believe some part of it must have been—it would have represented an instance of the “conscious” dimension of the “self-annihilating” or “self-refuting” tendencies within esotericism that I identified toward the beginning of the essay. However, this conscious element *by itself* could not have been sufficient to actually *accomplish* the destruction of esotericism; in fact, by itself it could succeed only in perpetuating it. So it can be assumed that, if such a conspiracy did indeed exist, it certainly did *not* go according to plan—a result that could have been predicted even at the very moment anyone decided to use esotericism to destroy esotericism by way of deliberate organization.

Again, the “First Coming” can be thought of as corresponding to the original public *dissemination* of a body of outer symbols that had in part been specifically *designed* for the purpose of having their “inner meanings” revealed at some later point in time. What I am calling the “First Coming” cannot be wholly assigned to any particular date, since the symbols involved were not necessarily being introduced to people for the first time by the Christian evangelists. Much of this symbolism would have been chosen because it was found in the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish religion; but some of it, I suspect, may have been chosen for incorporation precisely because it was *not* found in the Hebrew scriptures or the Jewish religion. And I think that even the Jewish symbolism that was chosen may have been chosen and presented (albeit probably somewhat unconsciously) in such a way that it would help to demonstrate commonalities among the religious belief-systems of the ancient world: the sort of commonalities that would be more likely found at a deeper, structural level of the religions, and therefore that would not have been readily apparent either to the casual onlooker or to someone already inclined *not* to see them. (However, some of the similarities and commonalities *are* readily apparent, but have often been willfully ignored or overlooked.)

I believe that several of the hypotheses I am offering—including that the “outer body of Jesus” was understood to signify a “body of lies” or “body of deception”; that the Gospel narrative was intended to prefigure future events; and that the authors of the New

Testament were involved in conscious conspiring—receive support from Matthew 27:62-66. In this passage the now-dead Jesus is spoken of as an “impostor” or “deceiver,” and the ministry that the Gospels depict him as having conducted prior to the Crucifixion is spoken of as a “fraud” or “deception”:

And (on) the next day [after the Crucifixion], which is (the day) after (the day of) the Preparation [for the Sabbath], the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together [syn-agō] before Pilate, saying, “Sir, we remember [mimnēskō] how that impostor [or deceiver; more literally, ‘wanderer’: *planos*] said, while he was still alive [zaō], ‘With [or after: *meta*] three days I rise [or wake: *egeirō*].’ Therefore order [keleuō] the tomb [or sepulchre: *taphos*] to be secured [asphalizō] until [heōs] [and also including?] the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him away [kleptō], and say to the people [laos], ‘He has been raised [or woken: *egeirō*] from the dead [nekros]’; and the last [eschatos] fraud [or deception; more literally, ‘wandering’: *plané*] will be worse than the first [prōtos].” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers [or a sentry: *koustōdia*]; go, make it (as) secure [asphalizō] as you know (how) [eidō] [or, ‘make it secure, as you know (how to do)’; or, ‘make it secure, as you are skilled at (doing)’].” So they went (and) made the tomb [taphos] secure [asphalizō] (by) sealing [sphragizō] the stone [lithos] and (setting) the guard of soldiers [koustōdia].

Read allegorically, this passage may have been meant (consciously or unconsciously) to convey the idea that the Bible itself—as well, for that matter, as *all* esoteric scriptures and myths—was a kind of “fraud” or “deception” or “impostor”; and appropriately so, since it had been presenting itself in a misleading and duplicitous way, by hiding beneath its outer, apparent meanings other, more “true” meanings. (Of course, the specific “esoteric meaning” that I am suggesting for this passage would not have become known to most people until the Bible was no longer serving to deceive people; but until then, the deceit would be flaunted before their eyes without their even being aware of it—perhaps for the unconsciously intended purpose of making them want to reject the entire scam of esotericist religion all the more vehemently once they finally did discover the deception that had been perpetrated against them.) If such a reading is correct, then it is the “inner meaning” of the scriptures—but only *so long as* that “inner meaning” continued to be “veiled” by another, “outer meaning”—that this passage would be describing as an “impostor.” And the image of “Jesus being raised from the dead” may have been intended to be read as a figurative way of expressing the notion of some “inner meaning” in the Bible being “resurrected”—that is, publicly revealed, or rehabilitated, or “brought back to life,” as a result of the esoteric symbols and parables being once again *made meaningful*—after some period of concealment, or “en-cryption,” so to speak. (And the “resurrection” of this “inner meaning” may have been understood to correspond to the “inner self” of the individual person being similarly “resurrected” or “woken” after a period of “dormancy” during which it had been hiding beneath an “outer self” or “false self.”) Observe also that (according to the portrayal of them in the passage, and according to my interpretation of the passage) what the “chief priests and Pharisees” are actually afraid of is not that the “raising” or “opening up” of this “inner meaning” will occur, but that it will occur *prematurely*, taking place before the symbolic “third day”

arrives (or, before it has been completed—it is not precisely clear what either Jesus or the chief priests and Pharisees have in mind when they speak of “three days”).

Such a reading would seem to be consistent with the suggestion I made earlier in the essay, that the New Testament authors may have understood the archetypal figure of the “elder son” (represented by Ishmael and Esau) to signify the “outer meaning,” while understanding the archetypal figure of the “younger son” (represented by Isaac and Jacob) to signify the “inner meaning.” The “*first* fraud” would refer to the “outer meaning,” corresponding to the “*first* son,” while the “*second* fraud” or “*last* fraud” would refer to some *incorrect* or *unintended understanding* of the “inner meaning”; and the “inner meaning”—whether the understanding of it be thought of as correct or incorrect—would here correspond to the “*second* son.” If so, then the authors of the New Testament apparently expected that the emergence of the “second son” would *not* lead to “wandering” (*plané*) in the way the “first son” had done; and, for some reason, the authors seem to have been confident that “the day of the Lord” would not arrive until any significant possibility that the revelation or “raising” of the “inner meaning” might lead to such “wandering” no longer existed. This leads me to the conclusion that this “cessation of wandering” must have been understood—whether consciously or unconsciously—to refer to the wholesale dismantling of the esotericist system, since esotericist techniques *by their nature* lead to mental “wandering”; indeed, it is their very *purpose*. I am therefore inclined to believe, in other words, that the revelation of any “inner meaning” or “inner doctrine” incompatible with the message that the esotericist form of religion *must itself be ended* would have been considered—whether consciously or unconsciously—to be a “fraudulent” or “misleading” inner meaning or inner teaching.

Furthermore, the idea of there being a symbolic “first person” or “first man” (which I think may have been understood to correspond to the “first son,” the “outer meaning,” and the “First Coming”), and as well as a symbolic “second person” or “second man” (which I think may have correspond to the “second son,” the “inner meaning,” and the “Second Coming”), is indicated by 1 Corinthians 15:45-47, in which Paul writes,

The first [*prōtos*] man Adam came into being a living soul [*psyché*]; the last [*eschatos*] Adam a life-giving spirit [*pneuma*]. But the spiritual [*pneumatikos*] (was) not first [*prōton*], but rather the natural [*psychikos*], (and) after that the spiritual [*pneumatikos*]. The first [*prōtos*] man out of earth [*gē*] (and) made of dust [or “made of dirt,” or “made of earth,” or “earthy”: *choikos*]; the second [*deuteros*] man out of heaven.

As a first matter, I think the symbol of “earth” or “dust” would have been meant to refer to the *materiality* or *physicality* of the outer symbolic forms (and this might correspond to the meaning of Esau’s name, if it was in fact derived from the Hebrew word *asah*, which in this context would probably mean “to touch” or “to handle [an object or tool]”), while the symbol of “heaven” would have been meant to refer to their more intangible conceptual aspect. Second, the Greek word *pneumatikos*, which means “spiritual,” is the adjective answering to the adverb *pneumatikōs*, which literally means “spiritually”; but we know from Revelation 11:8 that *pneumatikōs* can have the meaning of “figuratively,” “symbolically,” “allegorically,” or “metaphorically.” That suggests that “the spiritual (man)” may have been understood to correspond to or represent the collected *body* of

figurative meanings that the authors of the New Testament surreptitiously attached to the “material” or “carnal” symbols that they had in the first instance presented to the members of the Christian churches. Third, notice that the term “last” or “final” (*eschatos*) is here implicitly equated with the term “second” (*deuteros*), which makes it more likely that when Matthew 27:64 speaks of a “first [*prōtos*] fraud” and a “last [*eschatos*] fraud,” the author may have understood this to correspond to the “first man” and “second man” about which Paul is writing in the passage being quoted here—in which case, as I suggested above, the phrase “last fraud” would have been meant to refer to a particular *type* of “second man” (i.e., “inner meaning”); and this would in turn imply that there was understood to be some *other* type of “second man,” or “last man,” or “spiritual man” (i.e., “inner meaning”) that was *not* a “fraud” or “deception” (and one that would not lead to “wandering”). Fourth, consider that in 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 (the passage that I just gave in the block quotation), Paul says that both of these two “men” are to be regarded as different forms of the *same* “total man,” Adam. That increases the likelihood that the “outer meaning” and “inner meaning”—the “first man” and “second man”—may have been similarly understood to have been both contained in the *same* “total man,” Jesus; and it was only with the symbolic Crucifixion and Resurrection that the authors of the New Testament would have understood a conceptual division to have been effected between the “outer man” and the “inner man” that, when they come together, form what I am calling the “total man”—whether one chooses to think of this “total man” as “Adam” or as “Jesus”; and, whether one chooses to think of “Adam” as the “old Jesus,” or “Jesus” as the “new Adam.”

The “piercing” of a prophet’s “outer covering” as the necessary “penalty” for his having been deceptive—that is, for his having “impersonated Esau”

Another piece of evidence in support of the theory that the symbolic “outer body of Jesus” may have been understood to signify a kind of “body of lies” that would finally be “put off” or “laid aside” in the symbolic “Crucifixion,” is provided by Zechariah 12:10. In this verse, the author, speaking in the voice of the Lord, says,

I [the Lord] **will pour out** [*shaphak*; LXX: *ek-cheō*] **upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit** [*ruach*; LXX: *pneuma*] **of grace and of supplication, and they shall look upon** [or look unto: *nabat*; LXX: *epi-blepō*] **me** [LXX: *me*] **whom they have pierced** [or pierced through: *daqar*] [the LXX instead has “over whom they danced triumphantly”: *katorcheomai*]; **and they shall lament** [or mourn: *saphad*; LXX: *koptō*] **over him** [LXX: *autō*], **as one laments over an only (son)** [*yachid*; LXX: *agapētos*, meaning “a loved one” or “a dear one”], **and shall be in bitterness** [*marar*; LXX: *odynaō*, meaning “to be in anguish, to be tormented, to suffer pain”] **over him, as one that is in bitterness over a firstborn** [*bekor*; LXX: *prōto-tokos*].

Notice the distinction that is made here between “me” and “him.” It is “the Lord” who is depicted as a kind of “person,” who: a) has been “pierced”; and b) can *now for the first time* be “looked upon.” And perhaps the fact that this “person” can now be “looked upon” is *because of* his having been “pierced”—so that an “opening” has been made into his “hide” or “outer covering,” and some deeper insight into his essence has thus been

revealed. I posit that after the “piercing” occurs, a conceptual division is made between something living and something dead; and the name “the Lord” remains associated with the “something living,” which is henceforth “looked upon,” while a kind of “corpse” is also produced that has now become *conceptually dissociated* or *separated* from “the Lord.” And this “corpse” is also depicted as being that of a “firstborn son”—which suggests that a *conceptual dissociation* or *separation* between “the Lord” and the symbolic “firstborn son” (i.e., the “outer meaning”) has also occurred.

The use of the symbolism of “piercing” in particular, rather than of “opening” in general, suggests something more in addition to mere “opening”: “piercing” is “opening” something in such a way that the passage of either *air* or *liquid* is made possible. Any involvement of metaphorical “air” in the “piercing” symbolism would suggest the idea of “spirit” or “breath” (Greek *pneuma*), and thus the idea of “expiring” or “breathing out” or “giving out spirit” (Greek *ek-pneō*)—just as we find Jesus described doing at his death; as, for example, in Mark 15:37-39. And the specific type of metaphorical “liquids” that would have been involved in the Bible’s “piercing” symbolism would likely have been “blood” (or “wine”) and “water”—and these are what, in John 19:34, are described as coming out of Jesus’s body just after his death, as a result of his body having been “pierced.” I suspect that in practice these symbols of “blood” (or “water”) and “spirit” (or “air,” or “breath”) may have often been understood to be functionally interchangeable, partly because of the quality of fluidity that is shared by both gases and liquids; and I think the authors probably at various times envisioned “blood,” “water,” and “spirit” (or “breath”) as *all* escaping from the generic symbolic “opening” that had been created by the generic symbolic “piercing.” As such, I think that in the descriptions of the Crucifixion found in the Gospels, the fact that *both* “air” and “liquids” are described as “coming out of” or “going forth from” Jesus’s crucified body shows how concerned the authors of the Gospels were with emphasizing that *this* was the symbolic “piercing” referred to in Zechariah 12:10; and making this point was probably more important to them than distinguishing between the specific shades of meaning conveyed by the symbols of “air,” “water,” and “blood” (although I do think “air” and “water” may have had distinguishable symbolic meanings in the minds of the authors, at least some of the time). In short, I do not think it is likely the authors of the Gospel narratives had two or more conceptually distinct “piercings” in mind: I think *the entire episode* of the “Crucifixion” of Jesus was meant to be thought of as constituting a *single* “piercing” corresponding to the “piercing” described in Zechariah 12:10.

But apart from the “person” who represents “the Lord” in Zechariah 12:10, the verse describes *another* “person”—corresponding, I believe, to the notion of the “outer person” or “outer man” or “outer self”—and the passage says that this *other* “person” would be “mourned over.” I believe that these two “persons” may have been understood to roughly correspond to what I have been calling a “spirit of truth” and a “body of lies,” respectively—both of which, when joined together, would have been understood to constitute what the Bible calls “prophecy.” In addition, I think that this “outer person” may have been associated with the “firstborn son,” also corresponding to the symbolic figure of the “elder brother.” So this passage seems to be saying that the fate of the “firstborn son” or “elder brother” was to be “killed” by being “pierced”; and only after that had happened could “the Lord” be “looked upon” or “beheld” *in the person of* the “secondborn son” or “younger brother.” But the passage also says that it is “the Lord”

who has been “pierced,” which seems to indicate that “the Lord” was also understood to be present within (or joined together with) the person of the “firstborn son” or “elder brother”—the difference being, perhaps, that while “the Lord” was always *present within* the person of the “firstborn son” or “elder brother,” so long as the “firstborn son” was still “alive,” “the Lord” himself (represented primarily by the figure of the “secondborn son”) would have always been *hidden* or *concealed*, and so could not have been “looked upon.” So, according to the author’s conceptual scheme, it may have been that there was understood to be only one *living* “son” who was *visible* at any one time. And perhaps the “firstborn son,” the “outer person,” would have had to have been “killed” by being “pierced” before the “secondborn son” or “inner person” (perhaps thought of as virtually equivalent to “the Lord” himself) could ever be (fully) revealed, or known, or perceived; and the ability to perceive this “secondborn son” would presumably have also been understood to constitute a more direct knowledge of “the Lord.” In addition, consider that according to such a symbolic arrangement, both of these “persons” would be “pierced” simultaneously; the difference between the two “piercings” would be that the “inner person” or “secondborn son” (i.e., “the Lord”) would *survive* the “piercing”—and, indeed, would continuously “pour out spirit” because of it, and give rise to a *new* kind of “outer person”—while the (initial) “outer person” would *not* survive the “piercing.”

Furthermore, it strikes me as possible that the “birth” or “emergence” of the symbolic “secondborn son” was thought to be equivalent to the “inner person” *taking on the role* or *taking on the functions* of the “outer person”: the “inner person,” in other words, *becoming externalized*. The “birth” of the “secondborn son” would thus have signified the coming into being of a *unified person*, to be contrasted with an individual in which an ongoing division between these two aspects was maintained. If that is correct, then this way of conceptualizing the symbolism may have been related to the perceived nature of the “Holy Spirit,” such that a “body” that was “filled” with the “Holy Spirit” would have been deemed to have a more “integrated” quality than the same “body” when it was filled with some *other* kind of “air” or “liquid”—both of which symbols would have signified a “spirit” of some kind. Perhaps this “other kind” of spirit would have been considered to be a *mixture* of the Holy Spirit and something else, leading to *conflict* between the two: hence the idea of an “impure spirit” (or “unclean spirit”: Greek *pneuma a-kathartos*). I make this suggestion because an association between the idea of the “Holy Spirit” and the idea of “unity” or “overcoming of division” is indicated in several verses from the New Testament, some of which I have already indicated in the essay.

Again, I think the “outer person” (or “outer body”) and “inner person” (or “inner body”) would have corresponded to, respectively, the “outer meaning” (or “outer symbolic forms”) and the “inner meaning” of the scriptures. And the “outer person” or “outer body” would, at the same time, have represented the customarily accepted manner of “*joining together*” or “*mixing*” the outer symbolic forms and inner meanings in such a way that the “outer body” would serve to *hide* or *conceal* the true “inner meanings.” What might be called the “joined person” or “mixed person” would have been understood to include *both* the “outer person” and the “inner person” as its component “parts,” with the “inner person” thought of as being held as a kind of “captive” within the “outer person”; so the “outer body” would also have signified a kind of “state of imprisonment or captivity.” And again, I think the point of this passage may have been that it was necessary that this symbolic “joined person” or “mixed person”—which in the New

Testament can be found represented by the figure of “Jesus”—be “pierced,” with the result that the “outer person” or “outer body” would be “killed” and then *separated from* the “inner person” or “inner body,” in order to make it possible for “the Lord” to be *fully revealed* in the form of the “inner person” or “secondborn son,” who would “inherit” or “take over” the estate and the functions of the “firstborn son” from him (thus, in a sense, “becoming” an “elder son” in addition to a “younger son”). But, at the same time, it may have been deemed to be inevitable that this “death” of the “firstborn son” (i.e., the “outer meaning”) would lead to “mourning” among those who had accepted some more literal interpretation of the esoteric symbolism, since they would feel a great sense of loss at having to let go of the old body of meanings that they had assigned to the symbolism, due to their having become so greatly attached and accustomed to them.

There is also an alternative way of conceptualizing the symbolism (which I think may have been entertained by the authors of the New Testament even at the same time as they entertained the conception that I just laid out, given my sense that those authors did not assign a very high priority to consistency). The piercing of Jesus’s side is implicitly described in John 19:37 as the “fulfillment” of the prophecy made in Zechariah 12:10. As I have already indicated, I think this may have been meant to call attention to the possible fact that *the entire episode* of the Crucifixion of Jesus—and not only the specific act of the piercing of Jesus’s side by a Roman soldier—was meant to signify the “killing” of the “outer man” (or the “outer deceptive body,” or the “outer body of lies,” or the “firstborn son,” or the “false self”) by way of a “piercing.” (Again, I believe that the entire episode of the Crucifixion was only understood to involve a *single* symbolic “piercing.”) The “killing” of the “outer man” may have been understood to signify the *separation* of some prior *joining* of an “outer body” with an “inner body,” each of which would have had a particular kind of “blood,” or “soul,” or “spirit.” This “outer man” or “outer body” would have been “killed” by being “pierced” in order to allow the old “soul” (*psyché*, associated with “blood”) or “spirit” (which, in the case of both the Greek word *pneuma* and the Hebrew word *ruach*, can also mean “air” or “wind”) to escape. (Especially in the case of “spirit,” it may have been an “impure spirit” or “unclean spirit” that the authors specifically had in mind.) That *same* “body” of outer symbols would then have been filled with or joined to a *new* “spirit”: namely, the Holy Spirit. It would have been this *new* joining of the *same* metaphorical “body” with a new, pure kind of “spirit” or “blood” that would have resulted in that “body”—first made temporarily “dead”—being made once again “alive”: in other words, *meaningful*. It is some explanation along these lines that I believe may have been originally intended to serve as the “inner meaning” of the symbol of the “Resurrection” of Christ’s “body.”

In connection with the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, I think it is highly significant that Zechariah 12:10 is found in the text near Zechariah 13:2-4 (which I quoted earlier in the essay), which also mentions “piercing”—and the same Hebrew word *daqar* is used in both instances. Once again, the latter passage says,

And it will come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the earth [or the land: *erets*], and they will be remembered no more; and moreover I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass away from the earth [or the land: *erets*]. And it will come to pass that if any one again [or still: *owd*] prophesies, his father and mother who engendered him will say to him, “You shall not

live, for you speaks lies [or falsity: *sheqer*] in the name of the Lord”; and his father and mother who engendered him will pierce him [or pierce him through: *daqar*] when he prophesies. And it will come to pass in that day (that) every one of the prophets will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on a hairy outer garment in order to deceive [*kachash*].

Again, we know that John 19:37 implicitly describes the “piercing” of Jesus on the Cross as the “fulfillment” of the “piercing” (Hebrew *daqar*) predicted in Zechariah 12:10. Because the text of Zechariah 12:10 is found so near to the text of Zechariah 13:2-4, which likewise mentions “piercing” (Hebrew *daqar*), it would be reasonable to assume that the reasons given in Zechariah 13:2-4 why someone would be “pierced” *after* the arrival of “the day of the Lord” would be the *same* reasons why the person being spoken of in Zechariah 12:10 (there identified as “the Lord”) is described as having been “pierced” (*daqar*). So if, according to Zechariah 13:2-4, a person deserved to be “pierced” (*daqar*) for “prophesying”—which the text associates with “speaking lies,” “putting on a hairy outer garment,” and “deceiving”—then it would be reasonable to suppose that these were the very reasons why “the Lord,” in the “outer person” or “outer body” of “Jesus” (*along with* his “spiritual” or “inner” body), had been “pierced” in the Crucifixion, as indicated in John 19:34 and 19:37 (and, according to some manuscripts, in Matthew 27:49). And if this is correct, then it would imply that the figure of “Jesus” who was depicted as living and teaching *before* the events of the Crucifixion and Resurrection was meant by the authors of the Gospels to be understood as someone who “spoke lies,” who “wore a hairy outer garment,” and who “deceived” others. In other words, the figure of “Jesus”—both before *and* after the Crucifixion and Resurrection—would have been serving as the prototypical “prophet”; but the symbolic “Crucifixion and Resurrection” is what would have made it possible to *distinguish* the “spiritual” aspect of the “prophet” from his “fleshly” or “carnal” or “natural” aspect (which is the aspect that would have been associated with his “speaking lies” and “deceiving”).

To reach this conclusion would tend to confirm that my earlier assessment of the character of the pre-Crucifixion Jesus as it is presented in the Gospels—namely, as someone who practiced deception (based, for example, on John 11:11-14)—does not constitute an unfair misreading of the Gospels; and it may indeed even have been the very assessment that their authors had *consciously intended* would be made by the more careful and wary reader. The authors of the Gospels would have meant for the reader to understand that “piercing”—which I think would have been meant to symbolize the *exposing*, or *revealing*, or *penetrating* of the disguise or cover represented by the “outer meaning”—was the *inevitable* penalty for practicing deception: for trying, in other words, to keep some inner meaning “hermetically sealed” (pun intended) from a corresponding “outer meaning” that had already been put into circulation among the “profane multitude.” In short, I think the “Jesus” who had not yet “risen” was, consciously or unconsciously, intended by the authors of the New Testament to represent an esotericist form of religion, one whose religious teachers—all of whom would have likewise been collectively represented by the figure of “Jesus”—still *veiled* their “inner” (or “true,” or “intended,” or “best”) meanings in the form of cryptic parables and allegories. I think the “rising” of that same esotericist religion, and those same religious teachers, would have been understood to signify the shedding (or laying aside, or putting

off) of those former methods of concealment, as well as of any “outer meanings” that were *doing* the concealing; and such methods and meanings would have been collectively signified by the symbol of the “outer body,” as well as the symbol of the “hairy outer garment” that was associated with the figure of Esau—or, to be more precise, associated with the *impersonation of Esau* by Jacob.

Chapter 5: Schizophrenia, malignant narcissism, and autistic thinking; and their relation to esotericism and esotericist “initiation”

I firmly believe that a primary cause of the phenomenon of religious esotericism is psychological disturbance or trauma, or mental pathology; and I believe that only by viewing it as such can one possibly hope to make sense of religious esotericism. I have been led to this conclusion in large part by the fact that the ways in which religious esotericists use language is strikingly similar to the ways in which some schizophrenic persons have been described using language; so, if we can determine the reasons why certain schizophrenic persons use language in the way that they do, then it might be possible to determine the reasons for the existence of religious esotericism as a social and cultural phenomenon in human history.

A quotation that reveals a great deal about the manner of thinking of religious esotericists can be found in the writings of Jabir ibn Hayyan, an Islamic alchemist who lived during the 8th and 9th centuries. In his *Book of Stones*, Jabir, speaking about his use of esoteric writing techniques, says,

[W]e deliberately abrogate in one book what we say in another. **The purpose is to baffle and lead into error everyone except those whom God loves and provides for.**⁷

According to the Wikipedia article on Jabir, “His works seem to have been deliberately written in highly esoteric code, so that only those who had been initiated into his alchemical school could understand them. It is therefore difficult at best for the modern reader to discern which aspects of Jabir’s work are to be read as ambiguous symbols, and what is to be taken literally. Because his works rarely made overt sense, the term ‘gibberish’ is believed to have originally referred to his writings.”⁸ Let me repeat what Jabir wrote: “The purpose is to baffle **and lead into error** [!] everyone except those whom God loves and provides for.” This quotation sums up perfectly the mentality that permits supposedly righteous religious people to justify the use of esotericist writing techniques—which is, after all, **just another name for lying**.

As the material that is quoted below in this chapter demonstrates, the mentality of certain psychologically disturbed people is very similar to this. The attitude of certain schizophrenics, as well as of certain malignant narcissists and others, often seems to be something along the lines of, “If you really loved (me), then you would understand my secret language.” Meanwhile, the attitude of the typical religious esotericist is something along the lines of, “If you really loved (God), then you would understand my secret language.” If one attributes the attitude of the religious esotericist to psychological projection, so that he is substituting the idea of “God” for himself, then this shows the thinking process of the religious esotericist and that of the schizophrenic to be virtually identical; but the religious esotericist’s thinking process is that of someone who, for all practical purposes, is either unable or unwilling to distinguish in his own mind between himself and God—that is, God regarded in his absoluteness—*when the person makes his demands on others*. In other words, it is someone whose thoughts are characterized by a

⁷ Syed Nomanul Haq, *Names, Natures and Things: The Alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan and his Kitab al-Ahjar (Book of Stones)* (Springer, 1994), p. 162; the emphases are mine.

⁸ Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jabir_ibn_Hayyan (last checked April 29, 2016).

tremendous *self-absorption*. It is profoundly disturbing to think that this mentality may have characterized a significant number of the gurus, sages, priests, and prophets to whom people have turned for life guidance down through the ages.

It is important to emphasize that by my pointing out this connection, I am not trying to demonize all schizophrenics (or, for that matter, members of any other group of people). I do not in any way mean to suggest that schizophrenics are “guilty,” and that everyone else is “innocent.” In fact, I am somewhat inclined to say that, if anything, the reverse is the case; but that too would be inaccurate, since I think there is “guilt” to be found on both “sides of the equation” (to the extent that two separate “sides” can even be distinguished). And when I speak of “schizophrenics,” I wish also to emphasize that I am speaking only of persons who communicate using highly cryptic metaphor, and whose communication contains obscure “hidden meanings” or “hidden messages.” For that reason, I do not mean to suggest that all persons who have been given a diagnosis of “schizophrenia” are dishonest, since, as far as I know, not all persons who have been given a diagnosis of “schizophrenia” communicate in this way; and, even among those persons who *do* communicate in the ways I just described, it cannot necessarily be assumed that it is their actual *intention* to be misleading to others (even if it is their intention to communicate in ways that *happen to be* objectively misleading to others). And, conversely, I certainly do not mean to suggest that only schizophrenic persons are capable of being dishonest or thinking illogically, or that these problems are in any way restricted to them.

Furthermore, my goal is not to defame esotericist religion by insinuating that, since it has been the product of “crazy people,” it ought simply to be dispensed with for that reason alone. I am not trying to score cheap shots against esotericist religion through name-calling or guilt by association. Esotericist religion is not objectionable because it is the product of any particular group of people—even so-called “crazy people.” It is objectionable for definite, identifiable, socially harmful characteristics of its own, namely that it both exhibits and encourages *illogical and dishonest thinking patterns* which are expressed in people’s *communications*. Schizophrenic religious esotericists (as well as all promoters of their esotericist religious writings) do harm by *spreading* these irrational ways of thinking by means of misleading or confusing ways of communicating; and this occurs when, while an esotericist author does not himself believe in the *literal* truth of his own words, he at the same time either *actively encourages* others to believe in their literal truth, or is *content knowing* or *indifferent to the fact* that others will likely arrive at a belief in their literal truth. When harm is caused in such ways, I believe that others are justified in denouncing and trying to prevent what they are doing—in fact, I believe they have an affirmative obligation to do so; and they should not feel concern that their opposition will amount to “picking on” or trying to scapegoat anyone. When I denounce certain ways of thinking, I do so *only* in so far as these ways of thinking are involved in communication that is *objectively misleading or deliberately confusing*, and not *merely* because others happen to consider the content of their communication to be “unusual” or “unfamiliar” or “strange.” But, having said that, if the reason *why* the communication is considered “strange,” or “odd,” or “peculiar,” or “bizarre,” is *because* most people consider it to be misleading or deliberately confusing, then it deserves to be deemed socially harmful. No one has the “right” to be “eccentric” (even “spiritually eccentric”) if the likely and foreseeable result will be the deception or confusion of others.

While I believe people's thoughts, strictly speaking, are entirely their own concern, the way in which they use language with other people is *never* solely their own concern, precisely because human communication is, by definition, *never private*. (Or, at least, it *should* not be private, since I believe all of human society's problems flow from its having initially chosen to permit the development of "private *group* meanings" and "secret languages" among some subset of the larger society composed of people sharing the same conventional language.) *Language is always "public property"*; and the community composed of all speakers of a language always has the legitimate authority to insist that its common language be used such a way that it does not lead to deception or confusion among its speakers. If a person fails to abide by the rule not to use deliberately misleading or confusing language, then he should be regarded as having effectively forfeited his status as a member of that speech community. If we choose to assume that a schizophrenic esotericist (or any other esotericist; or any liar at all for that matter) has control over his actions, then we can think of our refusal to listen to what he has to say as punishment for his choice not to adhere to the necessary rules of discourse; or, if we choose to assume that the individual is *unable* to adhere to the rule against the use of misleading or confusing language, then our attitude toward him might be more pitying and patronizing, with our aim being to help him learn, if possible, how to adhere to the rule. Perhaps it should be left up to the individual person to decide whether he would prefer to be regarded by others as wicked, or as helpless and pitiable. (But it is because neither of these two options is desirable—since in neither case can the person expect to be listened to or taken seriously by others—that he has an incentive to try to adhere to the rule.) In neither case, however, should we *respect* or make accommodations for an individual's deviance from this rule. The misleading and deliberately confusing use of language cannot be regarded by anyone who wishes to live in a sane society as "just another way of communicating"—much less "a more profound way of communicating"—with a status equal to or even higher than that of honest, straightforward, and direct forms of expression.

I include in this chapter excerpts from two books written by psychiatrists, M. Scott Peck's *People of the Lie*,⁹ and R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self*,¹⁰ and as well as excerpts from a paper by Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland, entitled "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia,"¹¹ to better illustrate the connection between mental pathology and religious esotericism (along with the practice of esotericist "initiation"). The passages written by Laing and by Bateson et al. involve schizophrenia, while the passage written by Peck involves what he calls "malignant narcissism," a term first coined by psychiatrist Erich Fromm. While schizophrenia and malignant narcissism ought to be distinguished, it must at the same time be recognized that, from what I can gather, there is in certain respects a substantial overlap between the two conditions, and they can in some cases blur together. One thing that schizophrenics and narcissists (and some parents of schizophrenics) often have in common are ways of thinking that can generally be described as "autistic"—possibly, in some cases and at least to some extent, in the clinical sense of the word—but also in the more literal sense of the word (that is, in the sense of indicating "self-absorption" or "self-involvement"). A schizophrenic may or

⁹ Simon and Schuster, 1983.

¹⁰ Pantheon Books, 1969.

¹¹ In Milton M. Berger, ed., *Beyond the Double Bind: Communication and Family Systems, Theories, and Techniques with Schizophrenics* (Brunner/Mazel, 1978).

may not be “selfish” in the way that the narcissist typically is—that is, in a way that directly harms others—but it seems safe to say that, like the narcissist, the schizophrenic is generally very *self-involved*, so that his thinking processes and the way in which he assigns meanings to the words and language he uses may be quite *idiosyncratic*. In the mind of someone with “autistic” ways of thinking, the words that other people use give rise to mental associations that would seem quite random and odd to others if they were made public. For example, one such type of mental association is that based on little more than the sounds of words; and this might help to explain why “punning” is so frequently found in esotericist writing. In an “autistic” mind (with the term “autistic” understood in its broader sense), while the words used by a speaker often do have *an* effect on the person, in many cases this effect will be that of stimulating or inducing some train of thought that is *not the one intended* by the speaker. When this occurs, it is quite likely that the resulting train of thought will effectively involve delusion or fantasy of some kind, since it seems to reflect a refusal, for whatever reason, to participate in a *commonly shared* reality. In such cases, there is an unwillingness by the person to be responsive to the other person’s *intended meaning*; and he instead substitutes some other meaning that he would prefer to deal with, perhaps because he finds it less emotionally distressing, or perhaps for some other reason. The result is that he lives in an inner world in which the symbols and other mental stimuli that he perceives are often supplied with his own *private* meanings rather than with *common* or *public* meanings.

The unwillingness to make contact and engage with the larger world of common meanings may be the result of feeling that this “shared” world is not a *trustworthy* place, and that the schizophrenic, narcissistic, or otherwise “autistic” person will be safer so long as he remains in his “private” world. Whether or not the person is “justified” in believing this is not my concern for present purposes; the point I wish to make here is that, even if we assume that he is perfectly justified in believing this from his own perspective, based on his own experiences, the rest of society cannot reasonably allow his or anyone’s world of “private meanings” to become “mixed up” with the world of “public meanings” on an *ongoing* basis. The “private meanings” must either eventually *become fully public* through open attempts at persuasion, or they must *stay private*, remaining understood *by the individual alone* (and perhaps also by therapists or other persons, but then *solely* for the purpose of helping the individual to better express his private meanings *in terms of* the existing “public meanings” or “shared meanings” of his society). Above all, they cannot be allowed to become *semi-public*, so that the meanings are perpetually shared—or, rather, mistakenly *believed* to be shared—among some group of people larger in number than the single individual, but still smaller than the community composed of *all* of those persons who use the commonly shared conventional language. It is certainly understandable that the schizophrenic individual would want to escape his mental isolation by seeking out like-minded persons among whom he felt safe and understood, but society simply cannot permit him to escape from his mental isolation *in that way*. If the non-schizophrenic members of society wish to help the schizophrenic person escape from his mental isolation, they should instead closely examine the society that they expect him to share, and try to find ways to make its commonly shared world of public meanings *more sane*, and *more inviting* than it currently is in the eyes of a person contemplating whether to make the transition to a world of public meanings or to remain in his own world of private meanings—since it seems that in many cases it was the

insanity he experienced in his family life, or in the wider society, or some combination of both, that led him to retreat into a world of private meanings in the first place.

I now include the excerpts that I mentioned. The following excerpt is from M. Scott Peck's *People of the Lie*. All italicizing and the underlining are my own, and have been included to help point out how, in the behavior of a malignant narcissist during a therapy session with Peck, one is actually watching an "initiator" at work:

"I wondered, for instance, whether [Charlene] might have an obsessive-compulsive neurosis, and I questioned her about all the possible symptoms of this neurosis, such as ritualistic behavior. Charlene understood perfectly. With considerable enthusiasm she described several minor rituals she had performed during her early adolescence . . . 'But by the time I was fifteen,' she said, 'I realized these things were a silly waste of time, and I just stopped doing them. I haven't had any rituals since.'"

Later, after his patient described what he considered a "minor but repetitive interaction," Peck remarked to her that it sounded "like a bit of a ritual":

"Yes, I suppose you could call it a ritual."

"But I thought you didn't have any rituals."

"Oh, I've got lots of rituals," Charlene answered gaily.

"And she did. Over the next few sessions she told me of dozens of rituals. Almost every single thing she did was connected, one way or another, with a ritual. It became abundantly clear that Charlene did indeed have a form of an obsessive-compulsive disorder. 'Since you've got dozens of rituals,' I queried, 'how come when I asked you about rituals four months ago you told me you didn't have any?'"

"I just didn't feel like telling you. *Maybe I didn't trust you enough.*"

"*But you were lying.*"

"*Of course.*"

"Why should you pay me fifty dollars an hour to help you and then lie to me so I didn't know how to help?" I asked.

"Charlene looked at me archly. '***I'm certainly not going to tell you anything until I think you're ready to know it.***' she replied.

"Now that she had 'confessed' her rituals, it was my hope that Charlene would become increasingly open in our work together and I, consequently, less confused. It was not to be, however. Only gradually did it dawn on me that she was a 'person of the lie.' Although during the months and years ahead she would, willy-nilly, reveal one aspect or another of herself, *Charlene remained largely enigmatic. And I remained confused. Which was the way she wanted it. She continued until the end to withhold information from me, if for no other reason than to keep control of the show. And while my understanding of her was to deepen, so was my awe of her basic incomprehensibility.*"¹²

¹² Peck, *People of the Lie*, pp. 152-54; again, all emphases are my own. My purpose in including this passage is not to suggest that "Charlene" did not have the "right" to conceal information about herself from her therapist, or even to lie to him to protect her privacy. As I state in Chapter Six, I believe that a need to protect one's personal privacy and autonomy from intrusive questions or demands supplies the one (and the only) reason why lying to others can in some circumstances be justified. (And note that, according to Peck's account, the misleading response that "Charlene" gave was *in response to* his question; in other words, she did not initially *volunteer* to discuss the matter of her "ritualistic behavior.") My purpose is

The following is from R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self*:

"It is not uncommon for depersonalized patients, whether or not they are schizophrenic, to speak of having murdered their selves and also of having lost or been robbed of their selves.

"Such statements are usually called delusions, but if they are delusions, they are delusions which contain existential truth. They are to be understood as statements that are literally true within the terms of reference of the individual who makes them.

"The schizophrenic who says he has committed suicide, may be perfectly clear about the fact that he has not cut his throat open or thrown himself into a canal, *and he may expect this to be equally clear to the person whom he is addressing, otherwise that person is regarded as a **fool**. In fact, he makes many statements of this order, which may be expressly intended as **snares** for those he regards as idiots and the whole **herd** of the uncomprehending.* For such a patient it would probably be a complete *non sequitur* to attempt to kill his *self*, by cutting his throat, since his *self* and his *throat* may be felt to bear only a tenuous and remote relationship to each other, sufficiently remote for what happens to the one to have little bearing on the other. That is, his self is virtually unembodied. The self is probably conceived as immortal or made of nearly imperishable non-bodily substance. He may call it 'life substance' or his 'soul,' or even have his own name for it, and feel that he can be robbed of it."¹³

...
"[The defence employed by the psychotic] is the ultimate and most paradoxically absurd possible defence, beyond which magical defences can go no further. And it, in one or other of its forms, is the basic defence, so far as I have been able to see, in every form of psychosis. It can be stated in its most general form as: *the denial of being, as a means of preserving being*. The schizophrenic feels he has killed his 'self,' and this appears to be in order to avoid being killed. He is dead, in order to remain alive."¹⁴

...
"One of the greatest barriers against getting to know a schizophrenic is his sheer *incomprehensibility*: the *oddity, bizarreness, obscurity* in all that we can perceive of him. There are many reasons why this is so. Even when the patient is striving to tell us, in as clear and straightforward a way as he knows how, the nature of his anxieties and his

merely to show that the behavior that Peck is describing is strongly reminiscent of religious esotericism and the practice of "initiation," and points to a common mentality and to common motivations that may potentially be present in both types of situations.

An important difference between the two types of situations is that with religious initiation, unlike with psychotherapy, an "initiator" is in a position of power and authority over the "initiated" person (although, based on Peck's description, it sounds as if "Charlene" was trying to reverse the distribution of power and authority by her selective withholding of information); and so, if, in the context of religious initiation, an "initiator" in a particular instance is a malignant narcissist, then the "teachings," mentality, and world-view that are passed down from teacher to student can be expected to have a quality that is at least somewhat narcissistic.

¹³ Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 160-61; the first set of italics is mine, and the underlinings and emboldenings are mine. Consider how the words that I have underlined are used in the Bible and in other esoteric writings; and consider also the possibility that, in the contexts in which these words are found in such esoteric writings, their authors may have meant for them to be given esoteric meanings that would, in fact, not be very different from the way in which Laing uses the words here.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161; the emphasis is Laing's.

experiences, structured as they are in a radically different way from ours, the speech content is necessarily difficult to follow. Moreover, *the formal elements of speech are in themselves ordered in unusual ways*, and these formal peculiarities seem, at least to some extent, to be **the reflection in language of the alternative ordering of his experience, with splits in it where we take coherence for granted, and the running together (confusion) of elements that we keep apart.**

“Yet these irreducible difficulties are practically certain to be much increased, at least in one’s first encounters with the patient, by his or her **deliberate use of obscurity and complexity as a smoke-screen to hide behind**. This creates the ironical situation that the schizophrenic is often playing at being psychotic, or pretending to be so. In fact, as we have said, **pretence and equivocation** are greatly used by schizophrenics. The reasons for doing this are, in any single case, likely to serve more than one purpose at a time. The most obvious one is that it preserves the secrecy, the privacy, of the self against intrusion (engulfment, implosion). The self, as one patient put it, feels crushed and mangled even at the exchanges in an ordinary conversation. Despite his longing to be loved for his ‘real self’ the schizophrenic is terrified of love. Any form of understanding threatens his whole defensive system. His outward behaviour is a defensive system analogous to innumerable openings to underground passages which one might imagine would take one to the inner citadel, but they lead nowhere or elsewhere. The schizophrenic is not going to reveal himself for casual inspection and examination to any philandering passer-by. If the self is not known it is safe. It is safe from penetrating remarks; it is safe from being smothered or engulfed by love, as much as from destruction [or] from hatred. If the schizophrenic is incognito, *his body can be handled and manipulated, petted, caressed, beaten, given injections or what have you, but ‘he,’ an onlooker, is inviolable.*

“The self at the same time longs to be understood; indeed, longs for one whole person who might accept his total being, and in doing so, just ‘let him be.’ But it is necessary to proceed with great caution and circumspection. ‘Don’t try,’ as [Dr. Ludwig] Binswanger puts it, ‘to get too near, too soon.’

“Joan [a schizophrenic patient] says, ‘We schizophrenics say and do a lot of stuff that is unimportant, and then we mix important things in with all this to see if the doctor cares enough to see them and feel them.’”¹⁵

...
“A good deal of schizophrenia is simply **nonsense, red-herring speech**, prolonged filibustering **to throw dangerous people off the scent**, to create boredom and futility in others. The schizophrenic is often making a fool of himself and the doctor. **He is playing at being mad to avoid at all costs the possibility of being held *responsible* for a single coherent idea, or intention.**”¹⁶

...
“[Dr. Carl Jung said] that the schizophrenic ceases to be schizophrenic when he meets someone by whom he feels understood. When this happens most of the bizarrerie which is taken as the ‘signs’ of the ‘disease’ simply evaporates.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 175-76; all emphases are mine.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177; the emboldening is mine; the italicizing is Laing’s.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

“Julie [a schizophrenic patient] and her mother were at this time both desperate people. Julie in her psychosis called herself Mrs. Taylor. What does this mean? It means ‘I’m tailor-made.’ ‘I’m a tailored maid; I was made, fed, clothed, and tailored.’ **Such statements are psychotic, not because they may not be ‘true’ but because they are cryptic; they are often quite impossible to fathom without the patient decoding them for us.** Yet even as a psychotic statement this seems a very cogent point of view and it gives in a nutshell the gist of the reproaches she was making against her mother when she was fifteen and sixteen [that is, before she was deemed to be psychotic].”¹⁸

...
“We postulated that the basic split in the schizoid personality was a cleft that severed the self from the body:

self/(body-world)

“Such a scission cleaves the individual’s own being in two, in such a way that the I-sense is disembodied, and the body becomes the centre of a false-self system.”¹⁹

“The totality of experience has been differentiated by a line of cleavage within the individual’s being into self/body.

“When this is the primary split or when it exists along with the further vertical split of self/body/world, **the body occupies a particularly ambiguous position.**”²⁰

“The two basic segments of experience can be taken as

here there

which are further differentiated in the normal way into

inside outside
(me) (not-me)

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 209; the emphases are mine.

¹⁹ In other words, ideas of an “inner body” and an “outer body” may begin to arise. At the same time, this inner cleavage might also contribute to a desire to be a mere “member” of some larger “body” (such as the “body of Christ”) that a person could feel constituted his “real self,” *in such a way that* his sense of identity and freedom was obtained *at the expense of* having a sense of individual identity; with the result that, in the case of a Christian, he would conflate the ideas of “I” and “Jesus Christ” (and hence also that of “God”)—as Paul often does in his writings (see, for example, Galatians 6:17 and Romans 6:5-8). It may be that this submergence of the individual self in some larger “body” would occur as a *reaction against* the sense that one’s “real self” or “true self” was being forced to remain within the restrictive confines of one’s “inner body,” and from a desire to “break through” the “outer body” (signifying the false or otherwise distorted socially-presented self) in order to “expand” and “liberate” what was felt to be one’s “cramped” and “confined” real or true self.

²⁰ And I submit that the ambiguity of the position occupied by the body—such that the body might be viewed as either “inner” or “outer,” and thus as either “self” or “not-self”—is *not at all unrelated* to the existence of the kind of ambiguity in speech that makes it possible for “inner meanings” and “outer meanings” to co-exist in a single communication. If the meaning is one that the author associates with the “outer body” or “outer self” (read: “not-self”), then it is a mere “outer meaning”; and the result is that even if readers are misled or confused by such “outer meanings,” the “inner self” or “real self” of the author can always remain innocent, pure—and, above all, *not responsible*—for the fact that others have been misled or confused.

“The schizoid cleavage disrupts the normal sense of self by disembodiment the sense of ‘I.’ The seed is thus sown for a persisting running together, mergence, or confusion at the interface between here and there, inside and outside, because the body is not firmly felt as me in contrast to the not-me.

“It is only when the body can be thus differentiated from others that all the problems involved in relatedness/separateness, between separate whole persons, can begin to be worked through in the usual way. The self does not need so desperately to remain bottled up in its defensive transcendence. The person can be like someone without being that other person; feelings can be *shared* without their being confused or merged with those of the other. Such sharing can begin only through an establishment of a clear distinction between here-me, there-not-me. At this stage it is critically important for the schizophrenic to test out the subtleties and niceties that lie at the interface between inside and outside, and all that is involved in the expression and revealing of what belongs truly to the real self. In this way does the self become a genuinely *embodied* self.”²¹

A portrait of schizophrenia somewhat similar to that which Laing gives in these excerpts can be found in the paper by Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland, “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia.”²² The following excerpts are from that paper:

“The peculiarity of the schizophrenic is not that he uses metaphors, but that he uses *unlabeled* metaphors.”²³

...
“The convenient thing about a metaphor is that it leaves it up to the therapist (or mother) to see an accusation in the statement if he chooses, or to ignore it if he chooses. ... As an answer to the double bind situation, a shift to a metaphorical statement brings safety.²⁴ However, it also prevents the patient from making the accusation he wants to make. But instead of getting over his accusation by indicating that this was a metaphor, the schizophrenic patient seems to try to get over the fact that it is a metaphor by making it more fantastic. ... **The indication that it is a metaphorical statement lies in the fantastic aspect of the metaphor,**²⁵ **not in the signals which usually accompany metaphors to tell the listener that a metaphor is being used.** It is not only safer for the victim of a double bind to shift to a metaphorical order of message, but in an impossible situation it is better to shift and become somebody else, or shift and insist that he is

²¹ Ibid., p. 189-90; the emboldening and underlining are mine; the italicizing is Laing’s.

²² In Milton M. Berger, ed., *Beyond the Double Bind: Communication and Family Systems, Theories, and Techniques with Schizophrenics* (Brunner/Mazel, 1978).

²³ Ibid., p. 8; the emboldening is mine; the italicizing is in the original.

²⁴ According to the definition given on Wikipedia, “A double bind is an emotionally distressing dilemma in communication in which an individual (or group) receives two or more conflicting messages, and one message negates the other. This creates a situation in which a successful response to one message results in a failed response to the other (and vice versa), so that the person will automatically be wrong regardless of response. The double bind occurs when the person cannot confront the inherent dilemma, and therefore can neither resolve it nor opt out of the situation.” (Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double_bind; last checked May 16, 2016.) The hypothesis presented by Bateson et al. in their paper was that schizophrenia may be partly caused by the existence of many such “double bind”-type communications in the childhood family of a schizophrenic person.

²⁵ Such as ‘walking on water,’ or ‘being raised from the dead,’ or ‘being born to a virgin,’ perhaps?

somewhere else. Then the double bind cannot work on the victim, because it isn't he and besides he is in a different place. In other words, the statements which show that a patient is disoriented can be interpreted as ways of defending himself against the situation he is in. **The pathology enters when the victim himself either does not know that his responses are metaphorical or cannot say so.** To recognize that he was speaking metaphorically he would need to be aware that he was defending himself and therefore was afraid of the other person. To him such an awareness would be an indictment of the other person and therefore provoke disaster."²⁶

...
“The psychosis seems, in part, a way of dealing with double bind situations to overcome their inhibiting and controlling effect. **The psychotic patient may make astute, pithy, often metaphorical remarks that reveal an insight into the forces binding him. Contrariwise, he may become rather expert in setting double bind situations himself.**”²⁷

Consider in connection with the last paragraph that it may not be coincidental that the New Testament authors frequently use metaphors such as “binding” and “loosening”; and consider in particular the use of the metaphors “fettters” and “imprisonment” as used by Paul with regard to himself.

Also, these excerpts from Laing and from Bateson et al. help to show just how *schizophrenic* the author of Mark 4:33-34 makes the character of Jesus sound:

And with many such parables [*parabolé*] (Jesus) **communicated** [or spoke: *laleō*] (his) **meaning** [or message, or word: *logos*] **to them, in the degree that** [*kathōs*] **they were able** [or “had the strength”: *dynamai*] **to hear** [*akouō*]. **And apart from a parable he would not communicate** [or speak: *laleō*] **with them**; but in private [*kata idian*] **he explained** [or interpreted, or determined, or resolved, or solved; more literally, “loosened,” or “untied,” or “released,” or “opened,” or “set free,” or “unlocked”: *epi-lyō*] **everything** [*panta*] **for his own** [*idios*] **disciples.**

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 12-13; the emphases are mine; the ellipses are mine.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 22; the emphasis is mine.

Chapter 6: How to begin to solve the problem of esotericism

A first solution: Symbolism databases

I believe it is likely that all human beings, for better and for worse, have inherited the legacy of some earlier “primordial religion” (which may or may not have itself been esotericist in nature)—including the deteriorated and fragmented state in which we currently find it. But to speak of a “primordial religion” is really to speak of some body of accepted *meanings*; so the notion that we find in the Book of Genesis of a “confusing of language” occurring sometime in the distant past (whether this was understood to refer to esotericist “languages,” or conventional languages, or both) cannot be easily separated from the notion of the fragmenting of a primordial religion, since a “confusing of language” would have necessarily *caused* the fragmenting of any such religion; thus both notions are actually very closely related. Moreover, I doubt that it is merely coincidental that a fragmenting of language and religion of the kind I am describing seems to be reminiscent of the disordered and fractured state of the mind of an *individual* person in a state of psychosis. The resemblance between them helps one to see how the presence of both psychosis in an individual and the collective psychosis to be found in humanity can ultimately be traced back, at least in part, to the existence of the Lie—since the Lie is, by definition, the source of all deterioration, disordering, fracturing, and splitting apart of *meaning* in the world, by its tendency to create a *continuing* breach between *uttered* or *public meanings*, and *intended* or *private meanings*. A liar is not merely “unethical”: To the extent that a liar lies—especially to himself—he is **not sane**. And any society that is willing to tolerate lying as a normal part of life among its members is not merely “corrupt”: To the extent that a society tolerates lying by its members—which effectively makes it a *society* that is allowed to *lie to itself*—it is likewise **not sane**.

It follows from this that making an attempt to *reconstruct* or *reintegrate* the meanings of ancient religious scriptures might make some contribution toward weakening the power of the Lie and thereby promoting greater social sanity; so we might decide to see if it is possible to “knit back together” or “gather together” the fragmented meanings of the world’s religions to some extent. We would do this not because we assumed that such meanings were necessarily good ones, or because we felt obligated to embrace them as our own; it would be because we had realistically acknowledged that many people will need to *make sense* of those meanings, to get some minimally accurate idea of what they even *were*, before they will feel that they are able to take any position with regard to them. My own personal inclination would be to dispense with the old esoteric religious symbolism immediately, and simply start fresh with new, non-esoteric religious symbols or metaphors that would be immediately meaningful to those who used them; but I doubt that most other people would yet be prepared to follow me in this, since I realize that most people have not yet learned to loathe esotericism as much as I have. However, I do think they *would* learn to loathe it if they had come to feel that they had been *betrayed* by it; and I think they would come to feel betrayed by it if persons opposed to religious esotericism were able to reconstruct the original “inner meanings” of ancient religious writings—and especially the New Testament—convincingly *enough* that members of esoteric religions—and especially Christianity—were left with no choice but to acknowledge that nothing close to the originally intended meanings, even the most basic

ones, had ever been communicated to them by those who had claimed for themselves the responsibility for doing so.

Classics scholar Francis Cornford, in his book *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation*, offers some explanation of the ancient theory behind esoteric writing. In the case of esoteric writing, he writes, “[W]e should beware of charging [the esotericist writer] with inconsistency, and rather **look for cross-references**, characteristic of this method of writing” He also writes, “When the whole text had thus got into the mind [after having been memorized], one part of it would throw light upon another, and so the hidden meaning would gradually come out.”²⁸ This method or approach should be kept in mind as anti-esotericists go about trying to decipher the intended meanings of esoteric writings; and I have already provided a number of examples of how the method can be used.

One of the reasons why positing the existence of a primordial religion can prove valuable—even if no single “primordial religion” (or “primordial language”) ever in fact existed, and the concept is merely describing the workings of the collective unconscious human mind or of a continuous cultural diffusion—is that it allows us to extend this same process of cross-referencing beyond the confines, not only of a single text, but also those of a single culture; so knowledge obtained about the traditions of one culture might help to shed light on how we ought to interpret the cryptic symbolism of another, seemingly unrelated culture. For example, anthropologist Paul Radin tells us the following about the Polynesian Maori people of New Zealand:

The knowledge imparted to the priests was . . . definitely classified.²⁹ There were two branches called respectively the **upper-jaw** and the **lower-jaw**. The first branch contained everything pertaining to the gods, the heavens, the origin of things, the creation of man, the science of astronomy, the record of time, etc., and the second dealt with the history of the people, their genealogies, migrations, terrestrial things, etc.³⁰

In other words, the distinction being made seems to be equivalent to the distinction between “sacred knowledge,” corresponding to the symbol of “heaven,” and “profane knowledge,” corresponding to the symbol of “earth.” Now, regarding the events of “Ragnarok” in Norse myth—Ragnarok refers to the catastrophic end of the world-age, answering to the idea of “Apocalypse” or “Armageddon” in Christian thinking—Icelander Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century *Prose Edda* relates the following account:

Then something will happen that will be thought a most significant event, the wolf will swallow the sun, and people will think this a great disaster. Then the other wolf will catch the moon, and he also will cause much mischief. The stars will disappear from the sky. Then there will take place another event, the whole earth and mountains will shake so much that trees will become uprooted from the earth and the mountains will fall, and all fetters and bonds will snap and break. Then Fenriswolf

²⁸ Dover, 2004 [1912], p. 225; the emphasis is mine. Cornford credits his understanding partly to D. S. Margoliouth, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (London, 1911), p. 22.

²⁹ To clarify, what Radin means by this is that the knowledge was divided into two classes, not that it was kept confidential. (But it so happens that at least some of that knowledge was in fact kept confidential.)

³⁰ *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (Dover, 2002 [1927]), p. 321; the italicizing is in the original.

will get free. ... Fenriswolf will go with mouth agape and its *upper jaw* will be against *the sky* [understood to be equivalent to “*heaven*,” I would assume] and its *lower one* against *the earth*. It would gape wider if there was room. Flames will burn from its eyes and nostrils. ... The wolf will swallow Odin. That will be the cause of his death. And immediately after[,] Vidar will come forward and step *with one foot* on the *lower jaw* of the wolf. On this foot he will have a shoe for which the material has been being collected throughout all time: it is the waste pieces that people cut from their shoes at the toe and heel. Therefore anyone that is concerned to give assistance to the Aesir [i.e., the Norse gods] must throw these pieces away. *With one hand* he will grasp the wolf’s *upper jaw* and tear apart its mouth [perhaps meant to signify its ability not only to “devour,” but also to “speak”] and this will cause the wolf’s death.³¹

By no means does this definitively prove that the Norse and the Maori had similar meanings in mind with their respective “upper jaw/lower jaw” symbols—but if they had, it would help us in our attempts to make sense of the account given in the Prose Edda; it would suggest that the “upper jaw” may have been understood to correspond to what might be called “inner knowledge” or “inner meanings” (also corresponding to “heaven,” “spirit,” and the realm of “the sacred”), and the “lower jaw” may have been understood to correspond to what might be called “outer knowledge” or “outer meanings” (also corresponding to “earth,” “flesh,” and the realm of “the profane”). But whether or not initiated members of the two cultures did in fact assign similar meanings to these symbols, the comparison illustrates how the process of cross-cultural cross-referencing might be used to begin actually *answering* the question of what these symbols were intended to mean, so the matter can be (more or less) *settled* and humanity can finally move on from as much of the unnecessary “mystery” that surrounds the meanings of ancient religious symbols as possible. Esoteric religion must henceforth be regarded as *a problem to be solved*, rather than as the source of any solutions to our problems. Esoteric religion cannot help us advance in what characterizes all of us as human beings: our common search for a greater sense of meaning by which to guide our lives.

In going about solving the problem of esoteric religion, I believe that one of the more valuable things that could be done would be to create a symbolism database—or, even better, multiple databases, so that different methods could be experimented with. Such databases ought to be reasonably scholarly in nature, but also available to non-academics for editing—something like Wikipedia. Databases of this kind might help enable us to “crack the code” of esoteric symbolism (to the extent that it *can* be “cracked”) by using the available documentary evidence from *all* religious cultures, and not only that culture in which a particular scholar specialized.

For each symbol, as it was found in a particular *type* of context, various hypotheses could be presented as to what the meaning may have been that the authors using the symbol in that type of context understood it to have, with the *textual evidence* that supported each hypothesis being presented alongside it. When displayed in such a clear and summary fashion, in many cases it might be possible for an interpreter to roughly determine, with respect to his own purposes and concerns, the originally intended meaning of the symbol (again, listed in the database according to *type* of context) as used

³¹ Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Prose Edda*, pp. 53,54; all emphases are mine.

in the *individual* textual context in which he has encountered it. So these sorts of databases would not themselves declare “winners” by announcing the “true meaning” of a particular symbol in a particular type of context (much less the “true meaning” of the symbol *regardless* of the type of context in which it was found); but they would present the available evidence in such a way that the evidence could speak for itself concisely and convincingly for the individual researcher and interpreter. The reasons for offering a multiplicity of hypothetical meanings for each particular type of context are, first, that it is not always clear where the lines between different “types of context” should be drawn, or whether a specific text should be classified as belonging to one particular “genre” of literature or another; and second (and closely related to the first reason), there will often be reasonable disagreement over how to interpret the available textual evidence, even when the “type of context” (or “genre,” or “sub-genre”) of a specific text is more or less agreed upon. However, even though, for these reasons, I do not think a single “true meaning” should be announced for a particular symbol in a particular type of context, I see nothing wrong with listing the possible hypotheses in order of *likely* relevance or usefulness. And, hopefully, a general consensus would form around a fairly limited and thus manageable number of hypothetical meanings to be regarded as constituting the set of “most likely” meanings for a particular symbol as it was found in a particular type of context. The reason for making these decisions would not be to try to silence “incorrect interpretations” of the symbols for ideological reasons, but rather to make the database *as useful as possible* for those who were using it, keeping in mind that it cannot be predicted in advance what purpose a particular user might have for consulting the database. I believe that presenting the information in this way might facilitate the “translating” of symbols by interpreters as they found them to occur in the specific text they were reading (to the extent that such “translating” is in fact even possible).

Of course, the use of such a method assumes that a particular symbol has been used in a consistent fashion over time and among different groups and individuals—which in some cases may be an unwarranted assumption, even with regard to a single religious tradition. However, I do get the sense from reading that I have done that various ancient cultures would often use the same symbols that others did, and that—at some point in the distant past, anyway—those who used them had a fairly definite understanding of what they were supposed to refer to, even if that cannot be said of “uninitiated” readers like ourselves (which in the present day includes almost all, if not all, people); and I also get the sense that in many cases initiates from one culture would have been (at least somewhat) able to understand the meanings of the symbols used by initiates of another culture. So I think an approach such as this does hold some promise, even if success is not guaranteed for every symbol. If we could establish a moderate degree of certainty regarding even a core handful of symbols by using a cross-cultural approach, it might be possible to “leverage” that certainty to obtain the likely meanings of other symbols within a single religious tradition (as found in the *specific context* of a particular document) by using a process of inductive and deductive reasoning. And those newly discerned likely meanings might then in turn be used to shed light on any still-“undeciphered” symbols from other religious cultures, by serving as a source of testable suggestions. (But the “deciphering” of a symbol should always be thought of in relative terms. In this particular field of endeavor, there is no “right” or “wrong”: only “better” or “worse,” and “more” or “less.”)

In addition to cross-referencing the meanings of traditional religious symbols, I would also recommend researching psychiatric and psychotherapeutic case histories, looking for examples of the occurrence of those same symbols as metaphors in the speech of persons in a state of psychosis. (This information would not necessarily be incorporated into the same symbolism databases designed to deal with religious or mythological symbols—although I would not see anything objectionable about it if someone were able to figure out a good way of doing so.) I think this would do much to shed light on the more *fundamental, psychological* meanings of these symbols as they are found in the kinds of situations in which they *initially* spring to mind in individual human experience, in persons in whom the significance and emotional import of such symbols and metaphors is felt to be more intense than in most other persons—perhaps because their suffering is more intense than that of most other persons. In that sense, schizophrenics and other psychotic persons might be viewed as proverbial “canaries in the coal mine,” so that by trying to better understand their minds and their thinking, especially in relation to obscure religious symbolism, we would be helping others to better understand their own psychological workings and motivations—and thus also to account for non-psychotic persons’ own demonstrated attraction to the same types of symbolism. I think that doing this would likely help to convince people who are currently Christians or members of other esotericist religions that there are other, much more plausible explanations for the use of certain esoteric symbols—as well as for the *manner* in which the authors of esoteric writings such as the Bible have presented those symbols to the reader—than the explanations that they have generally so far received. I suspect, in other words, that the work of “deciphering” the language of schizophrenics would be found to relate very closely to the work of “deciphering” the traditional esotericist writings, such that the doing of the one would help to facilitate the doing of the other.

A second solution: Practical philosophical communities (i.e., non-esoteric religious communities)

It should be emphasized that the main purpose of the kind of “symbolism databases” that I am describing would be to “break the spell” of esotericist religion, rather than to give new life to it. It is true that, if at all successful, the “deciphering” effort made using these databases would make the esoteric symbolism somewhat more meaningful than it now is; but it should not be forgotten that, all other things being equal, an esotericist religion will *always and necessarily* be less meaningful than a non-esotericist religion; and a sense of meaning by which to live one’s life can be obtained with far less effort simply by pursuing a non-esotericist approach to religion. The primary benefit to be obtained from “symbolism databases” created along the lines that I am suggesting would be to eliminate *the aura of mystery* that currently surrounds religious symbols, so that religion might be rid of its current tendency to encourage unreflecting obedience and submission before arbitrary human authority, at the same time as its tendency to encourage dreamy self-absorption and solipsism in the individual—both of which (perhaps seemingly contrary) tendencies the esoteric nature of traditional religion makes inevitable.

For this reason, the work of draining esoteric symbolism of its mystery shares a common purpose with the work of building up alternative religions of a non-esoteric

nature. In the type of “non-esoteric religious communities” (a.k.a. “practical philosophical communities,” or “moral communities,” or “belief communities”) that I believe we desperately need, a person would effectively be *required* to take responsibility for assenting to or rejecting any proposition that claimed authority in that person’s life; but, of course, this could only happen if the person were first *allowed to understand* what the proposition even was—something that esotericist forms of religion (to the extent, that is, that the beliefs of the religion have their source in esoteric writings) effectively make impossible. In short, members of non-esoteric religions would be encouraged to think more like philosophers—in the best and widest sense of that word.

However, for a person to truly “assent to” or “reject” the type of proposition that I have in mind, he would have to choose whether or not to integrate it into his life and actions: I do not consider a person who claims to have “accepted” a certain philosophical proposition, but then fails to live his life in accordance with it, or advocate that his social institutions be designed in accordance with it, to have truly accepted it. So philosophical or theoretical discussion that did not *ultimately* and *finally* result in the putting into practice of the theoretical propositions that had been developed would not involve propositions that had ever actually been “assented to,” since there would have been no positive *commitment* made with regard to those propositions. And I consider discussion of philosophical propositions that are not *capable of* being either “assented to” or “rejected” in this *practical* sense, to be—at best—a waste of time.

I believe that to establish a society suffused with meaning requires the existence of numerous “*practical philosophical communities*” (a.k.a. “non-esoteric religious communities,” or “moral communities,” or “belief communities”), communities in which the virtues of *practical usefulness* and *honesty* would be assigned *equally* high value: the type of communities which, amazingly to me, our society does not currently have. What we now generally find is that academic philosophy and scholarship is not seriously interested in making itself practically useful, and esoteric religion is not seriously interested in honesty and clear thinking. A split currently exists between two sets of values or goals: on the one hand, those of scholarship, intellectuality, honesty, clarity and precision of thought and expression, and the desire to seek out truth and knowledge; and, on the other hand, those of practical usefulness, the sharing of a sense of common meaning and purpose, the giving of life guidance, and the giving of mutual support and protection. This split can no longer be maintained. In fact, I think there is a close relation between the historical legacy of esotericist religion and the sterility of much of academic philosophy and scholarship in its current state (such that modern-day academicians might well be considered the “secularized” successors of the “holy class” found in traditional religious societies—but if anything, showing even less interest in their work being of practical benefit to the “laity” than their predecessors showed). The kinds of esotericism found both in traditional religion and in modern academia are expressions of the same basic lack of a spirit of *commitment*, the same unwillingness to first make a *rational* and *socially useful* decision, whether through personal reflection or through discussion with others, and then to *take action* in conformity with that decision; and both are also expressions of the same fundamental split between the “inner” and the “outer,” between theory and practice—the overcoming of which split I believe constitutes *the* central concern of the New Testament (albeit one often presented in implicit and obscure form).

I think a major reason why this split now exists is that currently there are few *opportunities* to put a theoretical decision **directly** into practice **within a functioning community**, doing so in such a way that it took into account the welfare of the **whole** community (at the same time as that of the larger society, to the extent that individuals were able to attain an understanding of what would further it). Because of the lack of such opportunities, people's actions get "siphoned off" or "rechanneled" in such a way that the split between theory and action, between "inner" and "outer," becomes self-perpetuating, as people come to no longer even expect that such opportunities ought to be available to them to directly put theory into practice within a functioning community—and, at the same time, opportunities to develop or study theory in such a way that it was always done first and foremost *with an eye toward practice within a person's community and toward the benefit of the community*—and so they do not insist on access to such opportunities. Instead, they become accustomed to believe that—to the extent theory has any usefulness at all—its usefulness must always be made manifest **indirectly**, either through state action (accompanied by political activism), or through profit-seeking or individually acquisitive action—either of which type of action is effectively premised on a blind faith that some vague abstraction, whether it go by the name of "the democratic process" or "the market process," can be relied upon to *automatically* attend to the needs of the whole without any individual human being ever needing to do so **consciously**.

As an alternative to this state of affairs, the members of non-esoteric religious communities would, while being generally dedicated to the development of theory, make a point of directly working theoretical insights and understandings into the actual functioning of their own religious communities; indeed, they would make this their chief focus in life, giving it a higher priority than any matter with which the mass media or any other remote social institution might prefer that people concern themselves. Those who were developing theory at the more abstract and holistic levels of thinking would thus be expected to **take responsibility** for ensuring that their theoretical insights were actually **realized** in the social systems and institutions of whichever community they chose to affiliate with; and also to take responsibility for **the effective dissemination of the theoretical knowledge and information within their possession** to those individual members of their community who were expected to especially benefit from and be in need of that specific knowledge or information. This would replace the current widespread assumption that it is the sole responsibility of the individual person (even, increasingly, the individual child) to find the information and knowledge that he needs in order to protect himself from harm and to succeed in life. It would thus replace the "*caveat emptor*" and "not my problem" attitudes that now characterize, not just the business marketplace, but to a large extent our entire society. There is a sense in which these new, non-esoteric religious communities would, by interposing themselves as a barrier or shield between their individual members and business corporations or the state, do what the Christian churches *used to* do for their religious communities, but no longer seem able to do in the modern world—which is especially unfortunate given the fact that now, in the age of the massive state and the massive business corporation (the two of which are frequently interwoven), there is greater need than ever for just such a type of "barrier" or "shield" to protect individuals from predation and manipulation by power-

and control-hungry bureaucratic organizations that are effectively governed by no overarching moral framework that characterizes them *as organizations*.³²

The basic purpose of a non-esoteric religious community would be to provide each of its members with an overall world-view, to help them understand how the world works, and to tell them how they ought to go about succeeding in that world, *in view of the religion's own ideas about what "success" means*. And, beyond merely telling them how to succeed, they would also help give them the tools, skills, information, tutoring, direction, and guidance that would actually *enable* them to succeed. For such "practical philosophical communities" or "non-esoteric religious communities" to carry out their missions, it seems to me that their entire *general memberships* would have to concern themselves primarily with the following subject areas (in no particular order): philosophy (including metaphysics and logic); psychology and psychotherapy (considered as a subject matter, that is: I am not necessarily advocating that large numbers of people take part in *individual* psychotherapy); grammar and communication skills; parenting skills; and education, of both children and adults—that is, to the extent that education can be considered distinct from these other subject areas—or, for that matter, from the fundamental mission of the community itself. An interest in any one of these subject areas would be considered valueless without understanding its relevance to all of the other areas. The primary goal of such a community would not be to produce "scholars" in these areas, but to be effective at *diffusing* and *communicating* existing knowledge in these areas (as well as others) among an entire community of ordinary non-specialists so that the knowledge could be put to its best possible use. More specialized areas of knowledge might be pursued, but these would be considered to be of value to a community only *after* these more fundamental areas of concern had been properly attended to—that is, attended to in a holistic and integrated way, and in accordance with the overall shared religious world-view that defined the community as a community. It is implied in the foregoing that ***the division that is now generally made between education and religion, and the sort of sharp divisions made between specialties within academia, would have to be rejected***, at least in certain areas and to a certain extent. A community of such kind would of course require the knowledge of scholars who were also members of the particular community (at least some of whom would serve in a "ministerial" role in the community); but none of the scholars affiliated with any particular community could be permitted to be indifferent to the practical effect (or *lack* of practical effect) that their own scholarship had, either directly or indirectly, on the life of the community with which they were affiliated.³³

For example, a successful practical philosophical community would not award Ph.D.s in logic so that some small group of highly "logical" people could serve as the entire general society's designated "specialists" in logic, allowing a majority of people to be as illogical as they pleased, on the assumption that "thinking logically" was the primary concern of "those logic people," and that "those logic people" would be sure to attend to it on everyone else's behalf, and the fruits of their mysterious labor could be counted on

³² As such, one might describe each of these non-esoteric religious communities as eventually incorporating the functions (among others) of a church, a consumer advocate, a psychotherapist, a media institution, and an adult education program.

³³ I do not mean to suggest that such a scheme ought to be *imposed upon* any religious community by those who were not members of it; only that it seems to me that the chances for the successful functioning of any religious community would be maximized if its members chose to follow the approach that I have laid out.

to indirectly make their way to everyone else. For academic logicians to think that such an arrangement is socially sustainable *itself* demonstrates an inability to think in an even minimally logical manner—and then *take action* accordingly—**regarding the problems that need to be addressed most urgently**. (And again, trying to find *rational* solutions to problems that *actually matter* to an *actual community* of people, and then *taking action* in accordance with the conclusions that have been reached, would invariably be the approach taken by **all** members of a practical philosophical community, even its more theoretically inclined members.) Or, to take another example, for a psychotherapist to think that personality disorders or mental illnesses can be corrected or treated in the absence of logical and honest thinking—in an individual, *and* in a family, *and* in a community or society—is similarly myopic. But logical and honest thinking cannot be promoted if an individual—*or* fellow members of a family, *or* fellow members of a community or society—are indifferent to the importance of grammar and of clear and precise expression, whether written or spoken, as well as that of cultivating the ability to listen to others.

A third solution—and the most urgently needed one: The formation of “truth groups”

Unlike the creation of “symbolism databases,” the creation of “practical philosophical communities” or “non-esoteric religious communities” or “moral communities” is a somewhat more long-term goal. However, there is another solution that, like the symbolism databases, can be implemented almost immediately: the formation of what might be called “truth groups” (or “honesty groups,” to be more precise). And, as valuable as I think the symbolism databases might potentially prove to be, I think that the formation of truth groups would be of far greater importance, thus making the work of doing so more urgently needed. In fact, I envision that truth groups might potentially constitute the nuclei or beginning cores around which the moral communities that I describe in the previous section could come to form (with each of these communities practicing a non-esoteric religion or practical philosophy of its choice).

I propose that members of truth groups would make four pledges, the first three being the most important to stress. First: They will **never lie**, either to each other or to outsiders—**not even to those who have lied to them**. (There would be **a single exception** to this blanket “never lie” rule: a kind of “self-defense” or “self-protection” exception that would apply in cases in which an individual’s personal privacy or autonomy was being unreasonably threatened—for example, by being asked intrusive and impertinent questions.)³⁴ Second: **To the extent that they are reasonably able**, they will **never**

³⁴ When I say “they will never lie,” what I more specifically mean is that they will **never deliberately or recklessly mislead or confuse other people**. By incorporating the single “self-protection” exception into this rule, the basic principle that results is: A person will **never try to introduce more confusion into the world than there was when he found it**—not even for a supposedly “good cause.” It is essentially a “**do no harm**” principle. It does not entail any affirmative obligation to tell the truth (as a person understands “the truth”), regardless of whether the person wishes to tell it—or whether other persons wish to hear it. If, in situations in which a person’s personal privacy or autonomy was *not* being threatened, he ever felt that he was not reasonably able to say something true, then **he should say nothing at all**. And if he were threatened with punishment for *not* lying to innocent *third parties*, then he must accept the punishment—however harsh it might be. (Unless—perhaps—the threatened punishment was something extreme like the

tolerate lying by others. **Third:** *To the extent that they are reasonably able*, they will *never tolerate the condoning* (or promoting, or endorsing, or enabling) by others of lying by others. **Fourth:** They will strive to reduce how much they lie to themselves (at least to the extent they are able to do so, given that some degree of self-deception in every person is inevitable, and one must fight a never-ending battle against it).³⁵

A particular truth group could be formed around any interest that its members shared in common, or any mission or goal that they wished to jointly pursue. Any currently-existing group or association, including a small business, a non-profit organization, or an informal club, could always choose to *additionally* identify as a “truth group.” Members

person’s own death or maiming, or the death or maiming of some other individual. And even then, the harm that the deception would cause to the third party or parties, as well as whether the person expected that he would have an opportunity in the near future to retract or correct the deceptive statement, would also have to be taken into account. But such situations would be very rare. The only examples I can think of would involve hostages, P.O.W.s, and kidnap victims.) However, because of the “self-protection” exception, it would in that case be permissible for the person who was being threatened to lie to the person threatening him—for example, by promising that he would lie to innocent third parties even though he had no intention of keeping his promise, if telling this lie was necessary to avoid punishment.

It is implied in the foregoing that *any lying done by a person as part of his employment duties or as part of his occupation would never fall under the “self-protection” exception*. However, it would still be permissible for a member of a truth group to *work for* or *work with* persons who lied, even while on the job, or *do business* with persons who lied, if he was not reasonably able to avoid doing so.

Also, it should be noted that the “self-protection” exception would be applicable only in *some* instances in which an individual’s personal privacy or autonomy was being unduly threatened. If the person asking the question—even if it were a personally embarrassing question, the honest answer to which would be incriminating—had the right to expect that he would receive an honest answer, then the person answering the question would have a moral obligation to give an honest answer. I have no desire at this point to try to determine with exactness the sorts of situations in which a person would have a “right” to expect to receive an honest answer to an admittedly personally embarrassing question. (I will do no more than offer a single example of a situation in which I think a person would probably have the right to receive an honest answer to what is potentially an embarrassing question: when one spouse asks the other, “Are you cheating on me?”) I only wish here to emphasize the point that the “self-protection” exception *might* apply when embarrassingly personal questions are being asked, and not that it necessarily *will* apply in all cases. In determining when a person had a “right” to receive an honest and non-misleading response, the most important consideration would be to make certain that everyone had more or less *the same* conception of the sorts of questions and demands that would be considered unreasonably violative of a person’s privacy or autonomy, so that if they did choose to ask those sorts of questions or make those sorts of demands, they would not be *surprised* if they received responses that they later discovered to have been misleading in nature.

³⁵ It is worth clarifying at this point that while I do not consider honesty to be the *only* virtue, I do consider it to be the one really *crucial* virtue. That is because if a person—or a society—is not honest with itself, it cannot “think straight”; and if it cannot “think straight,” it cannot know how to make decisions about how it ought to conduct itself in such a way that it will best advance its own enlightened self-interest. If *everyone* in a society were required to be thoroughly honest with others, then all of the other virtues could be arrived at through a process of rational persuasion, combined (in certain cases) with avoidance or exclusion of those who had not been similarly persuaded. (And so while the generally applicable criminal law would continue to be enforced under such a scheme, it would not be based upon “virtue”—at least not in the sense that I have in mind as I am using the word here.)

I believe a variety of moral communities ought to be free to arise, with the variations among them due in part to the different ways in which their respective memberships chose to define “virtue.” But this would be a desirable state of affairs only so long as *all* of those memberships accepted honesty as the one *common* virtue that every person in society would be required to accept as the non-negotiable starting point for *any* kind of discourse or interaction between the members of one moral community and the members of any

of different truth groups wouldn't need to have anything in common with one another except a shared desire to promote the development of a thoroughly honest society.³⁶

It is impossible to predict the exact manner in which the process would unfold, but my general expectation is that over time the various truth groups would “link up” and associate with each other more and more closely and exclusively, giving them a growing ability to “shun” individuals and organizations not associated with any recognized truth group network. Eventually, all of the truth groups would collectively come to constitute a broad and inclusive “honesty culture.” Any person who was a member of *at least one* truth group would *ipso facto* be a member of the honesty culture. But any person who was not a member of *any* truth group could not be regarded as a member of the honesty culture; in fact, he would be regarded as a member of the “dishonesty culture” that would be composed of all those persons who were not recognized members of the honesty culture. As it grew in size and strength, this honesty culture would progressively “secede” from the surrounding dishonesty culture and operate as independently of it as possible, continuing to focus on its own growth and on expanding its own social influence, until the honesty culture was eventually able to supplant the dishonesty culture entirely.

What would it mean for the honesty culture to “secede” from the surrounding dishonesty culture? For one thing, it would imply, whenever reasonably possible, patronizing businesses owned by members of the honesty culture before patronizing businesses owned by members of the dishonesty culture. In other words, there would be a *partial boycott* of economic actors that had not yet made the choice to locate themselves within the honesty culture (*regardless* of how honest and trustworthy any one of those particular economic actors happened to be, since, by itself, merely *being* honest is not enough to build up an honesty *culture*). Members of the honesty culture would also be given preferences in other ways, such as in social interactions. Whenever there

other. The members of each of the moral communities would be free to conduct their affairs by the moral code that they had accepted for themselves and their children—*and then “sink or swim” accordingly*. (This relates to the goal of promoting *commitment* and *responsibility*.)

If persons found through their experience that they had in fact judged poorly when choosing a moral code for themselves—or that they had been born into a bad one—they could either try to change the beliefs held by their moral community, or they could leave and join a different one, or form a new one, depending on which of these options they thought would be the easiest for them to pursue. And bad moral codes would not, by means of deception or deliberate ambiguity, be able to receive an artificial and undeserved immunity from rational scrutiny by outsiders (as well as members). Whether good or bad, everyone else in the wider society would be able to *know* what the moral values of a particular moral community were, so that people would be able to *associate* certain moral codes and belief-systems *with their practical outcomes*. (Since the “self-protection” exception to the rule against lying would apply only to individuals, not groups or organizations, any moral community that chose to lie in response to inquiries about how it was conducting its affairs or what it was teaching its members could expect to receive some sort of appropriate penalty for having lied—a penalty severe enough to deter it and others from lying about such matters in the future. One conceivable penalty might be some set period of ostracism of that community by an assembly of other communities. However, I leave as open the question regarding the circumstances under which it would be permissible for a group of people to simply refuse to respond to inquiries from outsiders, assuming the group did not mislead anyone in the course of doing so.)

³⁶ Such truth groups could exist both online and in the real world; however, it seems to me that to work, online truth groups would have to require the use of real rather than anonymous identities in order to ensure accountability. In any event, I think online truth groups should at most be adjuncts to real-world truth groups, since to be consistently honest and intolerant of dishonesty often takes some courage, and so will require the *real-world* moral support of other people.

was a direct conflict between the two, a fellow member of the honesty culture would always be given *preferential treatment* as compared to someone still located outside the honesty culture.

The ultimate goal would be to create a completely parallel culture—and eventually, a dominant culture—that was simply devoted to honesty; and that’s it. There would be no “angle.” Organizing the truth groups would not be used as a pretext for pursuing some other political or social agenda that its members were *really* interested in pursuing.³⁷ As a result, members of different truth groups would be free to continue to disagree with each other over every question *except* the question of the importance of insisting upon honesty in society. Persons who did not want to actively associate with the members of one truth group would always be free to form another truth group; but, so long as both groups required honesty from their own members—honesty toward *both* those inside and those outside their own truth group, as well as those outside the entire honesty culture—each group would still recognize the validity of the other *as* a truth group (meaning that the members of each of the two truth groups would give preferential treatment to members of the other truth group as compared to persons located outside the honesty culture).

By this point, a question may have arisen in the minds of some readers: How can one be so sure that by “seceding,” members of truth groups would succeed in “freezing out” dishonest persons and enablers of dishonesty from mainstream society, and not just succeed in freezing *themselves* out of mainstream society?

There are several good reasons to believe that through the use of a *progressive, incremental* “shunning” or “boycotting” strategy, an honesty culture movement would *not* keep itself in a permanently marginalized position, but rather, would gradually become more and more dominant in society.

First, the fact that the honesty culture would take an inclusive stance toward *all* persons who sincerely held a single belief—namely, a belief in the importance of creating a thoroughly honest society—would prevent the honesty culture from ever being perceived as, or ever degenerating into, some sort of “weird cult” on the outskirts of social respectability. *Every* individual who was currently located in the dishonesty culture could for that reason always be seen as a *realistic* “convert” to the honesty culture as a whole (though not necessarily to any particular truth group, since the truth groups would be quite diverse in nature).

Second, the “reasonableness” standard found in the second and third rules would allow truth group members to continue interacting with and extracting benefits from the dishonesty culture to the extent that they found it excessively difficult to avoid doing so. Truth group members would not be asked to make an “all-or-nothing” decision, at least not in the early stages of the honesty culture movement when it was still in a weak position vis-à-vis the dishonesty culture; and they would never be asked to make any drastic sacrifices to advance the movement. (However, they would be reminded that the greater the sacrifices they were willing to voluntarily make, the more rapidly the honesty culture would grow.) Members of the honesty culture would always have the flexibility to decide the extent to which they felt reasonably able at any particular time and in any

³⁷ Speaking for myself at least, I am content in the belief that in a society in which fully honest discourse existed (but *only* in a society in which fully honest discourse existed), rational and mutually agreeable solutions to our commonly shared problems *would* be found; so I have no desire to make an “end-run” around those solutions in advance by way of any “plotting and scheming.”

particular situation to withdraw from the dishonesty culture and do without the immediate benefits of interacting with it—the sort of flexibility that members of the dishonesty culture would see no reason to practice in their own dealings with members of the honesty culture. For example, when making a purchase, members of the dishonesty culture would *invariably* look for the best combination of price, quality, and seller reliability for the purpose of advancing their own individual, immediate self-interest; while for members of the honesty culture, price, quality, and seller reliability would certainly be taken into consideration, but the membership status of the seller would also play a role in determining their final purchasing decision. (In fact, to the extent that seller reliability was an issue, members of the dishonesty culture would actually tend to be more inclined to buy from members of the honesty culture than from members of their own.) By the failure of dishonesty culture members to *discriminate against* honesty culture members in their dealings, especially their economic dealings, they would be helping to build up, expand, and strengthen the honesty culture without even realizing it—but they would not be harmed by their unwitting failure to discriminate, since in the long run, they, like everyone else, would be beneficiaries of the final victory of the honesty culture.

Third, and related to what I was just saying, members of the honesty culture would not need to fear economic retaliation or reciprocal discrimination from persons located outside the honesty culture.³⁸ It is impossible to imagine members of the dishonesty culture engaging in a boycott of members of the honesty culture in any way comparable to the one being engaged in by the latter, because any systematic boycott by the former would require that the dishonesty culture first take cognizance of itself *as* a “dishonesty culture,” and then organize itself along those lines—since there are no other lines along which the members of the dishonesty culture would be able to organize themselves if their goal was indeed to “retaliate.” And the notion of any substantial number of people organizing themselves around the “ideal” of dishonesty (accompanied by the closely related “ideal” of disloyalty) is a fundamentally incoherent and therefore inconceivable one.

Fourth, and most importantly, the strategy I am proposing actively takes advantage of the fact that groups of people who are required to be honest with each other will, on the average and in the long run, and all other things being equal, necessarily and inevitably *be more overtly successful* than groups of people who are not required to be honest with each other. To put it very simply: Honesty *works*; dishonesty *does not work*.³⁹ It is the social benefits—including economic benefits—that flow from group honesty and trust that would *more than “pay for” the costs* that truth group members would incur in gradually seceding from, and increasingly foregoing the immediate benefits of interacting

³⁸ I am here referring to the *total* “honesty culture”—including both the *genuine*, anti-esotericist honesty culture, as well as the pro-esotericist “honesty culture.” As I discuss below, there *would* be a real risk of (temporary) retaliation against an anti-esotericist honesty culture by a pro-esotericist “honesty culture” in the event of a “schism” between the two. (But since Christians, for example, already sometimes give preferential treatment to other Christians, including in their business dealings, one might reasonably ask who would really be “retaliating” against whom in the event of such a schism.)

³⁹ In connection with this idea, consider the following line from the 2015 movie *The Big Short*: “We live in an era of fraud in America. Not just in banking, but in government, education, religion, food, even baseball... What bothers me isn’t that fraud is not ‘nice.’ Or that fraud is ‘mean.’ For fifteen thousand years, fraud and short-sighted thinking *have never, ever worked*. Not once.”

with, the dishonesty culture; and it is this perpetual “profitability” of the movement that would permit the honesty culture to keep growing steadily and without impediment. By means of the consistent, principled, impartial, and deliberate *exclusion* from the honesty culture of dishonest persons and persons who were willing to tolerate, enable, or promote dishonesty (as opposed, that is, to the exclusion or inclusion of persons merely on the basis of visceral personal antipathy or attraction), it would become possible to *capture and retain the social benefits of honesty*—instead of allowing those benefits to *dissipate* throughout the entire society in such a way that they could be enjoyed also—or rather, even more so—by the dishonest members of society. This “capturing and retaining of benefits” is what would allow the honesty culture to gradually outcompete, outgrow, and ultimately supplant the dishonesty culture—resulting in *the entire society* being made a thoroughly honest one.

Fifth, and finally, a “ratchet effect” would be at work in the growth of the honesty culture movement. The growth of the movement would be gradual, but it would also be inexorable. That’s because while it would always be possible, through outreach efforts, to find additional recruits for the honesty culture, it is difficult to imagine many existing truth group members ever leaving the honesty culture to rejoin the dishonesty culture.⁴⁰ Members of the honesty culture would, on average, be more honest, trustworthy, loyal, rational, sane, and financially successful than members of the dishonesty culture. So the typical member of the honesty culture, once he had become familiar through first-hand experience with the advantages of belonging to the honesty culture, would realize that he would in no way benefit by relocating to the dishonesty culture.

In the initial stages of the movement’s development, I expect that the truth group members would tend to consist mainly of idealists, long-range planners, and strategic visionaries. They would be the persons who were able to appreciate that once the growth of the movement had reached a certain point, *the logic of the strategy* would make the movement’s ultimate success inevitable—regardless of how dramatically the type of society created by it would differ from anything human beings have ever seen before; they would understand that just because a certain state of affairs has never been seen by human beings, does not mean that the creation of that state of affairs is not feasible—provided there is solid logic arguing in favor of its feasibility. They would recognize that the successful creation of a fully honest society would in no way rest upon vain hopes that human nature would undergo *spontaneous* changes, unaccompanied by changes in people’s economic and other incentives (although the eventual success of an honesty culture would of course lead to changes in people’s habitual ways of thinking), since they would recognize that, according to the proposed strategy, the successful creation of a fully honest society would *in no way depend upon* large numbers of people being *verbally persuaded* of the merits of honesty in the abstract. These early truth group members would also be the persons who were willing to make moderate short-term sacrifices for the sake of advancing the movement, partly out of their confidence that the long-term benefits made possible by those sacrifices would far outweigh the sacrifices; but also partly due to a realization that even in the earliest stages, if a member had

⁴⁰ I say “many truth group members” rather than “any truth group members” because I can imagine the occasional member “selling out” by getting a highly lucrative job that required him to lie as part of his job duties, which would make it impossible for him to remain a member of any truth group. But relatively few members of the honesty culture would be presented with such opportunities, so the general “ratchet effect” would still be at work.

already been a generally honest person before joining a truth group, the immediate benefits he would obtain by associating to a greater extent than before with other honest, trustworthy, rational, and loyal persons might well exceed the amount of sacrifice he would be making, since the amount of “boycotting” or “shunning” expected of the average truth group member at any given time would always be in proportion to the size of the honesty culture at that time.

But at some point, once the honesty culture had become large enough, a great many non-members—whose notions of self-interest were not quite as “enlightened” as those of the early truth group members—would finally come to *perceive* that it was in their own *immediate* self-interest to become members of the honesty culture, *regardless* of how honest or dishonest they were by nature. Once that “tipping point” had been reached, when perceived immediate self-interest had become *fully aligned* with an ideal vision of society’s future—so that new members no longer perceived there to be any inconsistency between maximizing their own individual welfare and maximizing social welfare, and little if any rational foresight, or selflessness, or intellectual appreciation of the logic of the honesty culture strategy was still required of new members—the growth of the honesty culture movement would from that point on be literally unstoppable. But it would be the responsibility of the more idealistic and visionary early members of the honesty culture to see to it that, by means of ongoing outreach efforts, the movement grew just enough to reach this crucial “tipping point”—and then allow the intrinsic logic of the strategy to continue working itself out from there.

In addition to the “four rules” proposed above, I furthermore propose that there be an initial “transition period” for each truth group or truth group network during which members of truth groups would not be penalized for violating any of the “four rules.” In other words, during this initial transition period, as members were coming to learn exactly what would be expected of them as truth group members, and as they were getting into the habit of acting in accordance with those expectations, the “four rules” might be better thought of as “four aspirations.” Each truth group or truth group network would be free to decide for itself when it felt it was ready to “get more serious” by moving to the next stage, at which point penalties would be assessed for violations of the rules. (And when I speak of “penalties,” these might involve nothing more than giving the violator a dirty look or a frown, or just calling attention to the violation—if the members of a particular truth group found that this was enough to generally deter future violations. Otherwise, more severe penalties might be required.)

Of course, a particular truth group might decide to forego such a transition period altogether; but I think that would be an imprudent decision, since, especially at first, I can envision truth group members having sincere disagreements with one another about whether or not a particular type of communication in a particular type of situation ought to be regarded as indeed constituting lying or dishonesty. Ultimately, the identifying of a particular instance of “dishonesty” or “misleading communication” is something that cannot be done except by making reference to the reasonable understanding of the person or persons to whom the particular communication was made. But determining what a “reasonable” understanding is, as well as helping to ensure that a person’s understanding *be* “reasonable,” both require that people already know something—and also be willing to learn something—about the thinking processes of other persons, including the particular individual or individuals by whom and to whom the particular communication

was made, and also the members of society in general. An initial transition period for a truth group or truth group network would help give a jump-start to that needed “learning process,” during which members would be working toward achieving a rough general consensus as to what they would or would not consider to constitute “lying,” or “dishonesty,” or “misleading communication,” in various types of situations.⁴¹

During this transition period, members of traditional, esoteric religions would be welcome to join truth groups, because there would not yet be any basis for excluding them, since members of these religions—at least, the ones who would be interested in joining truth groups—do not regard *themselves* as promoting, condoning, endorsing, or enabling dishonesty by their being a member of their religion. But after the transition period comes to an end, I believe that anti-esotericists in the honesty culture must strenuously insist upon the position that religious esotericism constitutes one very important type of intolerable dishonesty, so that anyone who is a voluntary member of a traditional, esoteric religion must *ipso facto* be regarded as unreasonably promoting, condoning, endorsing, and enabling that dishonesty—and must therefore be excluded from the honesty culture—no matter how admirable the person’s character might otherwise appear to be.⁴²

For the most part, I would be content to accept the general consensus regarding what people did or did not consider to be dishonest or misleading in a particular type of situation, so long as their judgments were sincere, principled, and carefully considered; and I also believe that an honesty culture movement should strive to achieve as much unity within its ranks as it possibly could, provided it never compromised its fundamental mission by doing so. But I believe religious esotericism is the one specific form of dishonesty that is so dangerous—partly because its dishonest nature is so *non-obvious* to most people—that truth group members would need to recognize it as intolerable dishonesty *regardless* of whether a consensus, even a consensus within just the honesty culture, had yet formed around that conclusion. For that reason, I take the position that

⁴¹ However, the “learning process” would of course continue even after the initial transition period had come to an end, since this learning process is necessarily one without end: We can always be improving our knowledge of how other individuals will likely interpret, or make sense of, or react to, the communications that we make to them; and also improving our knowledge of how other individuals likely meant for us to interpret, or make sense of, or react to, the communications that they make to us. This ongoing learning process is the means by which we move toward increasingly effective *communication*—thus giving rise to an ever-closer or ever-tighter “meeting of minds” or “coming together of minds” or “gathering of minds” (which is, in fact, more or less what the words “communicate” and “commune” and “community” literally mean according to their etymologies).

⁴² As a general matter, keep in mind that a person’s exclusion from an (anti-esotericist) honesty culture would never be something that the excluded person ought to “take personally”; and members of truth groups would be wise to strive never to do or say anything that might generate hatred or ill-will toward individual members of the traditional, esoteric religions—especially since, according to the proposed strategy, *each and every one* of these persons is to be regarded as a future convert to the (anti-esotericist) honesty culture. And so, on those occasions when members of the honesty culture did choose to interact with members of the dishonesty culture, the members of the honesty culture would be wise to be just as courteous and friendly toward members of the dishonesty culture as they would be toward members of their own culture. The members of the traditional, esoteric religions should always be thought of as *competitors*, not *enemies*. The excluding of individuals would be done solely for the reason that the logic of the honesty culture strategy demands that it be done, and not because anyone felt personal animus toward the individuals being excluded; in fact, it is quite probable that each of the members of the anti-esotericist honesty culture would personally enjoy the company of some of the persons being excluded from the anti-esotericist honesty culture more than that of some of the persons being included in it.

truth group members who were anti-esotericist would have to be willing to allow a schism in the honesty culture movement to the extent that members of the traditional, esoteric religions had not yet been brought around to the anti-esotericist position by the time their own truth group or truth group network made the decision to end the initial transition period and begin assessing penalties of some kind against its members.

It is an inescapable fact that at the point when penalties of any kind began to be assessed, truth group members would no longer be able to “agree to disagree” about what they believed constitutes “dishonesty” in a particular type of situation; at that point, they would need to *know with certainty* whether a truth group member *would* or *would not* be regarded as unreasonably promoting, condoning, endorsing, and enabling dishonesty merely by that person’s being a voluntary member of one of the traditional, esoteric religions. According to the strategy I am proposing, the honesty culture movement would not recognize any such thing as “harmless lies” (since if a particular communication was deemed to be truly “harmless,” it would not be regarded as a “lie” at all); and that means members of those traditional, esoteric religions would have to take one of three positions: 1) Religious esotericism is not in fact a type of dishonesty; 2) Religious esotericism is indeed a type of dishonesty, but their own religion is not in fact esoteric; or 3) They have no choice but to take leave of their religion, at least in its current form. But even if they refused to take leave of their religion in its current form, they would be forced to give serious consideration—probably for the first time in their lives—to the question of whether religious esotericism is intrinsically dishonest, as well as to the question of whether their own religion qualifies as “esoteric”; and the very instigating of such questioning would itself be highly desirable.

The likely result I anticipate would be a division of the “honesty culture” into two (or possibly more) rival camps or factions; and each would be vying for the support of the *entire* “honesty culture” in order that the schism within the movement might be ended. According to the logic of the proposed strategy, for the honesty culture movement to succeed in finally displacing and supplanting the dishonesty culture, it would *require unity*. As long as *multiple* supposed “honesty cultures” co-existed—competing with each other for the public’s support—the dishonesty culture would *necessarily* continue to exist, since the presence of thoroughgoing honesty in society requires that everyone in society be more or less *in agreement* as to what will be considered “honesty” or “dishonesty” in any given type of situation. If the recipients of a certain type of communication *feel* that they have been lied to or misled by it, the fact that the persons doing the communicating do not *believe* that they were lying to or misleading anyone when they made the communication does not make the problem disappear; in fact, it only highlights the existence of the problem, since it indicates a mental “disconnect” between the communicators and the recipients that makes it quite likely the recipients will continue to feel lied to or misled by future communications. As long as the communicators and the recipients do not agree on what constitutes “dishonesty” or “misleading communication,” the recipients can never know when they might feel misled, and so will feel forced to metaphorically (and perhaps also literally) “keep their distance” from the communicators—and the maintaining of any such mental and communicatory *division* in society makes it impossible to defeat the dishonesty culture. *As long as multiple supposed “honesty cultures” co-exist, the dishonesty culture is in*

*effect able to continue to operate by hiding within at least one of those supposed “honesty cultures.”*⁴³

Moreover, at least one of those supposed “honesty cultures” might try to do the “retaliating” against the *genuine* honesty culture that the dishonesty culture would like to be doing—but is logically unable to do—*on behalf of the dishonesty culture*. And this would be possible because, *in actual practice*, the supposed “honesty culture” doing the retaliating—specifically, one of the traditional, esoteric religions—had chosen to make the chief principle (or idea, or value, or belief) around which it organized, not *dishonesty*, of course, but something *other than* honesty (such as, for example, the sanctity of a certain scripture supposedly inspired by God). It is this elevation of some principle (or idea, or value, or belief) *above* the value of honesty that has made it impossible to extirpate the dishonesty culture that pervades the entire world, including all of its religions. This devaluation of honesty also has the effect of maintaining arbitrary and harmful divisions between different peoples, since, in order to “define” itself and maintain its unique “identity,” each of the traditional religions has chosen to have as its most highly cherished principle or idea something *different from* what each of the other traditional religions has chosen to be *its* most highly cherished principle or idea. If each of the traditional religions had instead chosen to make *honesty* its primary and most highly cherished principle or idea—and in theory they all could have done that, since each of those religions claims to place a high value on honesty—then all of the world’s religions could have organized around the *same* chief principle or idea; with other, more *variant* principles or ideas being, not unimportant, of course, but of *secondary* importance. And it would be appropriate to make honesty in particular the single chief unifying value for all world religions and all peoples, for the very basic reason that *all* human beings are able to agree that they do not like to be lied to or misled. I have no objection to the existence of a multiplicity of religions (in fact, I think it’s a very good thing); but *all* of the members of those (non-esoteric) religions ought to think of themselves as being members of a *single* honesty culture—eventually, a worldwide one—that would be able to *embrace* and *include* all of those various non-esoteric religions. **Honesty must be recognized as the only possible basis for true peace**—peace among different religions, and among different individuals, and among different nations.

If a schism within the “honesty culture” movement did in fact occur, the members of the pro-esotericist faction would, of course, simply deny that religious esotericism is dishonest, or that their own religion is esoteric, and so argue that the anti-esotericists ought to be driven out of the movement due simply to the unreasonableness and wrongheadedness of their destructively divisive and schismatic demands. Meanwhile, the members of the anti-esotericist faction would advocate that the pro-esotericists likewise be driven out of the movement—for the simple reason that they were unreasonably promoting, condoning, endorsing, and enabling an intolerable (albeit an admittedly subtle) form of dishonesty. And the schism within the movement could not be ended—one way or the other—*except* as a result of various people giving serious thought

⁴³ Consider that the situation I am describing is actually the situation that we *already* have, in that each of the traditional, esoteric religions claims to be opposed to dishonesty—making each of them a *supposed* “honesty culture” that *competes with* the other *supposed* “honesty cultures” for members—which is what has made it possible for the “dishonesty culture” to survive by “slipping through the cracks,” so to speak. And that’s because any “honesty culture” that does not make the promotion of honesty its absolute *highest priority* is not a *genuine* honesty culture.

to the question of whether religious esotericism is in fact a type of dishonesty, and to the question of whether the traditional religions are in fact esoteric in nature. But once the debate had been framed in that manner, *anti-esotericists would win*, since the dishonesty of religious esotericism has endured for as long as it has *only by avoiding notice*. Once the subject of religious esotericism had been seriously and critically considered and discussed for the first time ever, it would not be able to withstand close scrutiny.

In the long run, if the *genuine*—that is, non-esotericist or anti-esotericist—honesty culture is to succeed, the contrast between it and the dishonesty culture *hidden within* the pro-esotericist “honesty culture” (or “honesty cultures”) would have to be displayed as starkly as possible. Traditional, esoteric religious organizations could not be allowed to indirectly and parasitically benefit from the success of the honesty culture that would be created by anti-esotericist truth groups; and truth groups would have to avoid providing a social service to members of traditional religions that would have the effect of blurring over or masking the evils and harm that are *inevitably* caused by the esoteric nature of their religions. If the truth groups did provide such a social service, the result would be to enable traditional religions to keep limping along indefinitely because people for sentimental reasons were unwilling to make a total and final break with them in their current forms.

If Christian churches, say, were succeeding in their self-appointed task of providing people with communities in which they were given proper mental guidance in life and encouraged in their aspirations to become more virtuous, then it would not be necessary to form truth groups at all; if that were the case, my recommendation would simply be that everyone should join a local Christian church (or something analogous). ***The forming of truth groups—and, out of them, non-esoteric moral communities—would be in direct response to the failure of traditional, esoteric religion***; and traditional, esoteric religion has failed because it did not consistently adhere to the unalterable moral law against lying and dishonesty. In fact, truth groups (in the Western world, anyway) would have to view Christian churches as their chief “competition” (*not* “enemy”)—at least until a particular Christian church agreed to reject the esoteric aspects of Christianity and move to a rational and honest scheme of religion in which encoded, deliberately ambiguous, or otherwise deceptive or misleading language would *never* be used in its authoritative writings. At that point, however, I would no longer think of the religion that it professed as “Christianity,” even if the church figured out a way to incorporate a great deal of Christian theological and moral teachings into its belief-system purely on philosophical or rational or intuitive grounds—and that is something to which I would personally have no objection whatsoever. In any event, I would expect that by whatever name the church chose to call itself, it would be one that made clear to the public that the members of the church had decided to make a distinction between themselves and traditional, Bible-preaching Christians.⁴⁴

Again, my hope is that eventually truth groups would themselves come to serve as the foundations for the new moral communities, or “churches,” of our society, and take over the responsibilities of the existing churches (to the extent, that is, that the existing churches refused to abandon the use of esoteric word-symbols and verbal figures in their

⁴⁴ I distinguish between “Bible-preaching” and “Bible-reading,” since I am not necessarily opposed to the mere *reading* of the Bible by a religious congregation; what I am opposed to is treating the Bible as an *authoritative* religious writing (rather than merely as a work of literature)—which is what the term “preaching” implies.

authoritative writings). But until that happens, it is necessary that a line be drawn, and that people be required to *make a choice* to stand on one side of that line or the other—and then abide by the consequences of their decision. A member of an esoteric religion must—as an objective matter—be seen as *necessarily* condoning, endorsing, promoting, and enabling dishonesty, even if he is currently doing so in relative good faith. That fact should not stop opponents of religious esotericism from showing kindness toward him, or continuing to communicate with him—and this especially so in the early stages of the development of the honesty culture, as both members and non-members of the traditional religions are still getting used to these new ideas. But if one rationally reaches the conclusion that members of the traditional, esoteric religions are persons who—objectively speaking—condone dishonesty merely by their being voluntary members of those religions, then it is necessary that members of truth groups also *think of them* and *treat them* as persons who—objectively speaking—condone dishonesty by their actions. That condoning of dishonesty may well be in relative good faith at the moment due to ignorance; but as time goes on, it will become increasingly difficult for members of esoteric religions to make that claim. In any event, a refusal by members of truth groups to tolerate dishonesty or the condoning of dishonesty in any particular instance does not depend upon anyone’s lack of good faith; indeed, the (polite) insistence that others detach themselves from all religious esotericism would *itself* be one of the primary means by which people of good faith might be *alerted* to the objectively harmful nature of their actions. As the result of consistently pursuing this approach—and if, at the same time, members of esoteric religions were finally offered attractive and realistic alternatives to those religions as sources of meaning, purpose, guidance, and fellowship in their lives—I do not believe that it is unreasonable to suppose that members of those traditional, esoteric religions might eventually decide to leave them in large numbers (unless, of course, traditional religious communities decided to reject the esoteric elements of their religions while at the same time preserving the non-esoteric elements—at least in their authoritative writings).

The only thing about a program of forming anti-esotericist truth groups that could even be claimed to be “controversial” would be its opposition to all esotericism in authoritative religious writings, and to any religion and religious sect that refused to abandon those esoteric elements. A demand that all esotericism in authoritative religious writings be rejected will undoubtedly strike many people as “intolerant,” at least when they first encounter it. But over time I think more and more people will come to understand and accept that such a position is really required—like it or not—by a consistent devotion to the principle of honesty. So eventually, the only “controversy” that would remain would be whether our society, and each of us individually, will opt for Truth or the Lie. And that is exactly how the “controversy” ought to be framed.

The simple purpose of truth groups would be to win people over to a culture of honesty and away from a culture of dishonesty—*by insisting that they make a choice*, one way or the other. The overall strategy can be very briefly summed up as: *Isolate and quarantine*. Or, to use a slightly different analogy, all of the honest people in society might be thought of as representing a host body besieged by parasites; and truth groups would be the means by which the host body could gradually, but systematically, one by one, either detach the parasites from itself, or else force the parasites to stop their parasitic ways and rejoin the host body as honest and fully constructive members of the

greater organism. It is important never to forget that *every liar*—to the extent that he is a liar—*is a parasite* who benefits from the honesty of others, since it is their honesty that holds society together and makes it work.

In essence, the message delivered by the truth groups to liars and apologists for lying would be something along the following lines: “We’re not trying to force you to be honest against your will; whether you are to be an honest person or not is entirely your decision—at least for the time being. But we *are* going to force you to *choose* which party you want to be a member of: the Party of the Lie, or the Party of Truth. If you choose not to join our party, we’re going to minimize our contact with you, and eventually—when we have the ability to do so—cut it off entirely. You will be left to fend for yourself in a ruthless culture of liars and lunatics and backstabbers, a culture made up solely of other people whom, like you, we have *required* to effectively ‘go on record’ as *knowingly and deliberately rejecting honesty in society as something that is unimportant to them*. Your culture of liars will get progressively smaller as time goes on, as we continue our outreach efforts and as more people find out about us. And, as it gets smaller, you can expect that the people remaining with you will, on average, keep getting more and more toxic, as fewer and fewer decent people will still be around to dilute the toxicity. Now, as this process unfolds, periodically ask yourself if lying—by yourself and by others—is still as much fun, and as funny, as it used to be, and whether the benefits you get from lying and putting up with lying are still able to offset all of the increasing unpleasantness in the same way that they used to. After all, wasn’t that the reason you embraced the Lie in the first place—the benefits? So, there’s no need for you to become defensive or hostile towards us. We won’t try to attack you for accepting dishonesty in your life. But we will let you stew in your own juices until you wise up; and in the meantime, we’re going to attend to our own affairs as free of your interference and harmful influence as possible.”

Truth groups could be designed in a variety of ways, and I would encourage them to experiment with different forms of organization—provided they adhered to the basic core rules that I described at the beginning of this section; otherwise, they could not be considered to be truth groups “in good standing” by other truth groups. As I already indicated above, truth groups would not have to be nothing *but* “truth groups”; I certainly do not envision that most truth groups members would do nothing but, say, discuss books about alethiology (the technical name for the philosophical study of truth). I would encourage them to pursue other common interests, and so have overlapping identities. For example, one could form a fishing club that also happened to be a truth group, or a golf league that also happened to be a truth group, and so on.

But at least some truth groups would need to focus more on engagement with outsiders for purposes of winning new recruits to the movement as a whole: partly in a (politely) “destructive,” or “negative,” or “confrontational,” or “combative” way, by relentlessly (but always politely) criticizing the weak intellectual foundations and downright absurdities of esotericist religion whenever its apologists put forth their arguments; and partly in a more “constructive” or “positive” way, by engaging in educational “outreach” geared toward encouraging outsiders to “convert” to habits of clear thought and communication, and with that, away from their habitual awestruck respect for religious mystification, meaningless “profundity,” and hopelessly obscure and inaccessible “ancient wisdom.” But pursuing this sort of “intellectual activist” approach

is not what would *characterize* a truth group; any such combination would be based solely on the interests and temperaments of the members of a particular group. In other words, “intellectual activism” would not be required of the members of all truth groups. The sincere desire to be honest and to live in an honest society would be the only requirement.

The idea of truth groups is especially appealing because people cannot defame them—at least, not without making themselves look bad. Everyone *claims* to simply adore truth and honesty—in public, anyway—and, by definition, any defamation of truth groups would also have to be done in public. Moreover, for the same reason, truth groups could not be suppressed by the use of legal processes. So the only alternatives available to any opponents that the truth groups might have would be to infiltrate or subvert or harass them; but, as a practical matter, I do not see how it would be possible to counter them in any of these ways either. For one thing, they would be too numerous (since if they were not numerous, no one would take any interest in them); and it would not be possible to “make an example” of some small number of them, since, by definition, this would involve attacking them in public—which, as I have just indicated, is not a viable option. For another thing, exactly how does one “infiltrate” or “subvert” a fishing club or golf league (or whatever) that is simply made up of people who want to be honest and promote honesty, given that it has no other political or social “agenda”? I suppose that the so-called “deep state” could conceivably send out secret paid agents to join fishing clubs and golf leagues all across the country, who would then act in a highly disruptive manner to induce all of the other members to quit. But this could not realistically be expected to happen; much more likely, the group would simply expel the disruptive new member.

So “they”—whoever “they” happen to be in the mind of any particular person—are not standing between us and truth. The only thing that stands between us and the realization of a fully honest society is the possibility that *individual* people might *individually* decide that they just do not want to give up lying—at least, not badly enough to risk giving up the supposed “perks” of being dishonest in a dishonest society. But I do not think most people would make that decision—*once they had been pressured to make one*. I think most people would choose to be *fully* honest if they knew that doing so would eventually entitle them to the *benefits* of living in a *fully* honest society. To put it another way, I believe a great many people would choose to be more honest and to make greater efforts to promote honesty—but only if they knew that they would get support from others around them if they were to make that choice. Truth groups are what would provide the needed beginning support for these people.

No matter how corrupt the dominant social institutions become, people *always* have the option of creating little havens of honesty for themselves through the creation of truth groups. Once in existence, their power is theoretically impossible to stop; but to bring theory into realization, there must at the outset be some relatively small but still sizeable number of people who sincerely *want* and *demand* truth and honesty in their own lives—and are willing to make efforts to bring that about. The very idea of truth groups puts into dramatic relief the existential choice that all persons have to make about how important truth *really* is to them. With truth groups, it’s put-up or shut-up time. No more complaining about lying politicians, or lying news reporters, or lying used car salesmen, or lying whomever. No more big talk about how you are going to take up arms and fight a

revolution against the government. All you have to do is *consistently* not lie and not laugh off or make mental excuses for the lying of others when you encounter it. That's it. If you're unwilling to do even that much, then you've essentially forfeited any right you may have had to get upset about any other person's lying—because that other person has apparently done nothing more than come to the same conclusion that you've come to: that insisting upon truthfulness and honesty in people's communication is just too much trouble, that there are more pressing things in life to worry about, and that practicing and putting up with some dishonesty is just “how the world works.” Well, if you take pride in being such a “hard-nosed realist” about such matters, then you should stop whining and getting in a huff whenever you discover one of your fellow “hard-nosed realists” engaging in his own “hard-nosed realism” in some way that's not to your liking. It is often (and rightly) said that “the truth will set you free,” but when push comes to shove the typical person has thus far proven to be more devoted to the maintenance of his own shabby little world of lies—to his own actual detriment—than to the great goal of attaining his own freedom along with everyone else's. It is possible to imagine henceforth taking a very different and far more promising course.

I am not exaggerating when I say that I believe this world would be a veritable paradise if humanity—or even some small portion of humanity—could just summon up the resolve to put all of its lying ways behind it once and for all. People could choose paradise at any time—and they could *achieve* paradise, step-by-step, by *consistently* making the choice never to lie, and never to treat lying by others—*any* lying—as something trivial in nature. The really *crucial* moral choices are actually quite simple to identify (though not necessarily easy to make, at least not at first); but, taken as a whole, people have never even begun down the road of making them. I believe that this is largely because traditional, esoteric religion has historically had the effect of making the *identifying* of our most crucial moral choices seem much more complicated and confusing than it needed to be. If people were able to rid themselves of that mental burden, it is likely that they would be able to see, with considerably more clarity than they now can, what those really crucial moral choices are. And, once they had clearly recognized the path that they would need to go down, I think it would be possible for them, by joining with other people who desired the same goal and who would be there to provide mutual encouragement and support, to actually traverse that path and arrive at a fully honest society.

But before people can be expected to provide that encouragement and support to others, they must first desire the goal for themselves. People must learn to passionately *want* truth and honesty more than anything else in life—regardless of what anyone else might now *seem* to want. They must be determined to create a new state of mind in themselves; followed by a new mode of action in the world.

Appendix: Readings

1. Sociologist Georg Simmel on truthfulness and lying
2. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, "Live Not By Lies"
3. From "On Giving the Lie," from Montaigne's *Essays*

Sociologist Georg Simmel on truthfulness and lying (1908)

Truthfulness and lie are of the most far-reaching significance for relations among men. Sociological structures differ profoundly according to the measure of lying which operates in them. ... ***[I]n very simple circumstances the lie is often more harmless in regard to the maintenance of the group than under more complex conditions.*** Primitive man who lives in a small group, who satisfies his needs through his own production or through direct cooperation, who limits his intellectual interests to his own experiences or to unilinear tradition, surveys and controls the material of his life more easily and completely than does the man of higher cultures. To be sure, the innumerable errors and superstitions in the life of primitive man are harmful enough to him, but far less so than are corresponding ones in advanced epochs, because the practice of his life is guided in the main by those few facts and circumstances of which his narrow angle of vision permits him to gain directly a correct view. In a richer and larger cultural life, however, existence rests on a thousand premises which the single individual cannot trace and verify to their roots at all, but must take on faith. ***Our modern life is based to a much larger extent than is usually realized upon the faith in the honesty of the other.*** Examples are our economy, which becomes more and more a credit economy, or our science, in which most scholars must use innumerable results of other scientists which they cannot examine. ***We base our gravest decisions on a complex system of conceptions, most of which presuppose the confidence that we will not be betrayed. Under modern conditions, the lie, therefore, becomes something much more devastating than it was earlier, something which questions the very foundations of our life.*** If among ourselves today, the lie were as negligible a sin as it was among the Greek gods, the Jewish patriarchs, or the South Seas islanders; and if we were not deterred from it by the utmost severity of the moral law; then the organization of modern life would be simply impossible; for, modern life is a "credit economy" in a much broader than a strictly economic sense. [From *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff (Free Press, 1950), pp. 312-313; the emphases are mine.]

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, “Live Not By Lies” (1974) (written while Solzhenitsyn was living in the Soviet Union)

At one time we dared not even to whisper. Now we write and read *samizdat*, and sometimes when we gather in the smoking room at the Science Institute we complain frankly to one another: What kind of tricks are they playing on us, and where are they dragging us? Gratuitous boasting of cosmic achievements while there is poverty and destruction at home. Propping up remote, uncivilized regimes. Fanning up civil war. And we recklessly fostered Mao Tse-tung at our expense—and it will be we who are sent to war against him, and will have to go. Is there any way out? And they put on trial anybody they want, and they put sane people in asylums—always they, and we are powerless.

Things have almost reached rock bottom. A universal spiritual death has already touched us all, and physical death will soon flare up and consume us both and our children—but as before we still smile in a cowardly way and mumble without tongues tied. But what can we do to stop it? We haven't the strength.

We have been so hopelessly dehumanized that for today's modest ration of food we are willing to abandon all our principles, our souls, and all the efforts of our predecessors and all the opportunities for our descendants—but just don't disturb our fragile existence. We lack staunchness, pride and enthusiasm. We don't even fear universal nuclear death, and we don't fear a third world war. We have already taken refuge in the crevices. We just fear acts of civil courage.

We fear only to lag behind the herd and to take a step alone—and suddenly find ourselves without white bread, without heating gas and without a Moscow registration.

We have been indoctrinated in political courses, and in just the same way was fostered the idea to live comfortably, and all will be well for the rest of our lives: You can't escape your environment and social conditions. Everyday life defines consciousness. What does it have to do with us? We can't do anything about it.

But we can—everything. But we lie to ourselves for assurance. And it is not they who are to blame for everything—we ourselves, only we. One can object: But actually you can think anything you like. Gags have been stuffed into our mouths. Nobody wants to listen to us, and nobody asks us. How can we force them to listen? It is impossible to change their minds.

It would be natural to vote them out of office—but there are not elections in our country. In the West people know about strikes and protest demonstrations—but we are too oppressed, and it is a horrible prospect for us: How can one suddenly renounce a job and take to the streets? Yet the other fatal paths probed during the past century by our bitter Russian history are, nevertheless, not for us, and truly we don't need them.

Now that the axes have done their work, when everything which was sown has sprouted anew, we can see that the young and presumptuous people who thought they would make our country just and happy through terror, bloody rebellion and civil war were themselves misled. No thanks, fathers of education! Now we know that infamous methods breed infamous results. Let our hands be clean!

The circle—is it closed? And is there really no way out? And is there only one thing left for us to do, to wait without taking action? Maybe something will happen by itself? It will never happen as long as we daily acknowledge, extol, and strengthen—and do not sever ourselves from—the most perceptible of (the encirclement’s) aspects: Lies.

When violence intrudes into peaceful life, its face glows with self-confidence, as if it were carrying a banner and shouting: “I am violence. Run away, make way for me—I will crush you.” But violence quickly grows old. And it has lost confidence in itself, and in order to maintain a respectable face it summons falsehood as its ally—since violence can conceal itself with nothing except lies, and the lies can be maintained only by violence. And violence lays its ponderous paw not every day and not on every shoulder. It demands from us only obedience to lies and daily participation in lies—all loyalty lies in that.

And the simplest and most accessible key to our self-neglected liberation lies right here: Personal non-participation in lies. ***Though lies conceal everything, though lies embrace everything, we will be obstinate in this smallest of matters: Let them embrace everything, but not with any help from me.*** [The emphasis is mine.]

This opens a breach in the imaginary encirclement caused by our inaction. It is the easiest thing to do for us, but the most devastating for the lies. Because when people renounce lies it simply cuts short their existence. Like an infection, they can exist only in a living organism.

We do not exhort ourselves. We have not sufficiently matured to march into the squares and shout the truth out loud or to express aloud what we think. It’s not necessary.

It’s dangerous. But let us refuse to say that which we do not think.

This is our path, the easiest and most accessible one, which takes into account our inherent cowardice, already well rooted. And it is much easier—it’s dangerous even to say this—than the sort of civil disobedience which Gandhi advocated.

Our path is not to give conscious support to lies about anything whatsoever! And once we realize where lie the perimeters of falsehood, each sees them in his own way.

Our path is to walk away from the gangrenous boundary. If we did not paste together the dead bones and scales of ideology, if we did not sew together the rotting rags, we would be astonished how quickly the lies would be rendered helpless and subside.

That which should be naked would then really appear naked before the whole world.

So in our timidity, let each of us make a choice: Whether consciously, to remain a servant of falsehood—of course, it is not out of inclination, but to feed one's family, that one raises his children in the spirit of lies—or to shrug off the lies and become an honest man worthy of respect both by one's children and contemporaries.

And from that day onward he:

- Will not henceforth write, sign, or print in any way a single phrase which in his opinion distorts the truth.
- Will utter such a phrase neither in private conversation nor in the presence of many people, neither on his own behalf nor at the prompting of someone else, neither in the role of agitator, teacher, educator, nor in a theatrical role.
- Will not depict, foster or broadcast a single idea which he can see is false or a distortion of the truth, whether it be in painting, sculpture, photography, technical science or music.
- Will not cite out of context, either orally or written, a single quotation so as to please someone, to feather his own nest, to achieve success in his work, if he does not share completely the idea which is quoted, or if it does not accurately reflect the matter at issue.
- Will not allow himself to be compelled to attend demonstrations or meetings if they are contrary to his desire or will, will neither take into hand nor raise into the air a poster or slogan which he does not completely accept.
- Will not raise his hand to vote for a proposal with which he does not sincerely sympathize, will vote neither openly nor secretly for a person whom he considers unworthy or of doubtful abilities.
- Will not allow himself to be dragged to a meeting where there can be expected a forced or distorted discussion of a question.
- Will immediately walk out of a meeting, session, lecture, performance or film showing if he hears a speaker tell lies, or purvey ideological nonsense or shameless propaganda.
- Will not subscribe to or buy a newspaper or magazine in which information is distorted and primary facts are concealed.

Of course, we have not listed all of the possible and necessary deviations from falsehood. But a person who purifies himself will easily distinguish other instances with his purified outlook.

No, it will not be the same for everybody at first. Some, at first, will lose their jobs. For young people who want to live with truth, this will, in the beginning, complicate their young lives very much, because the required recitations are stuffed with lies, and it is necessary to make a choice.

But there are no loopholes for anybody who wants to be honest: On any given day any one of us will be confronted with at least one of the above-mentioned choices even in the most secure of the technical sciences. Either truth or falsehood: Toward spiritual independence, or toward spiritual servitude.

And he who is not sufficiently courageous even to defend his soul—don't let him be proud of his "progressive" views, and don't let him boast that he is an academician or a people's artist, a merited figure, or a general—let him say to himself: I am in the herd, and a coward. It's all the same to me as long as I'm fed and warm.

Even this path, which is the most modest of all paths of resistance, will not be easy for us. But it is much easier than self-immolation or a hunger strike: The flames will not envelope your body, your eyeballs, will not burst from the heat, and brown bread and clean water will always be available to your family.

A great people of Europe, the Czechoslovaks, whom we betrayed and deceived: Haven't they shown us how a vulnerable breast can stand up even against tanks if there is a worthy heart within it?

You say it will not be easy? But it will be easiest of all possible resources. It will not be an easy choice for a body, but it is only one for a soul. No, it is not an easy path. But there are already people, even dozens of them, who over the years have maintained all these points and live by the truth.

So you will not be the first to take this path, but will join those who have already taken it. This path will be easier and shorter for all of us if we take it by mutual efforts and in close rank. If there are thousands of us, they will not be able to do anything with us. If there are tens of thousands of us, then we would not even recognize our country.

If we are too frightened, then we should stop complaining that someone is suffocating us. We ourselves are doing it. Let us then bow down even more, let us wait, and our brothers the biologists will help to bring nearer the day when they are able to read (that) our thoughts are worthless and hopeless.

And if we get cold feet, even taking this step, then we are worthless and hopeless, and the scorn of Pushkin should be directed to us:

"Why should cattle have the gifts of freedom?"

"Their heritage from generation to generation is the belled yoke and the lash."

From “On Giving the Lie,” from Montaigne’s *Essays* (1580)

The first stage in the corruption of morals is the banishment of truth; for, as Pindar said, truthfulness is the beginning of a great virtue, and is the first item that Plato demands of the governor of his Republic. Our truth of today is not what is, but what others can be convinced of; just as we call “money” not only that which is legal, but also any counterfeit that will pass. . . .

Thus I have often pondered what could be the source of that custom, which we observe so religiously, of feeling more bitterly offended when taxed with this vice, which is so common among us, than with any other; and that it should be the worse insult that can be given us in words, to accuse us of lying. My findings on the matter are that it is natural to defend ourselves most for the defects with which we are most tainted. It seems that in resenting the accusation and growing excited about it, we unburden ourselves to some extent of the fault; if we have it in fact, at least we condemn it in appearance.

Would it not also be that this reproach seems to involve cowardice and lack of courage? Is there any more obvious cowardice than to deny what we have said? Worse yet, to deny what we know?

Lying is an ugly vice, which an ancient depicts in most shameful colors when he says that it equals giving evidence of contempt for God, and at the same time of fear of men. It is not possible to represent more vividly the horror, the vileness, and the unhealthiness of it. For what can you imagine uglier than being a coward toward men and brave toward God? Since mutual understanding is brought about solely by way of words, he who breaks his word betrays human society. It is the only instrument by means of which our wills and thoughts communicate, it is the interpreter of our soul. If it fails us, we have no more hold on each other, no more knowledge of each other. If it deceives us, it breaks up all our intercourse and dissolves all the bonds of our government. [Michel de Montaigne, *Selected Essays*; translated by Donald M. Frame (Walter J. Black, 1943).]